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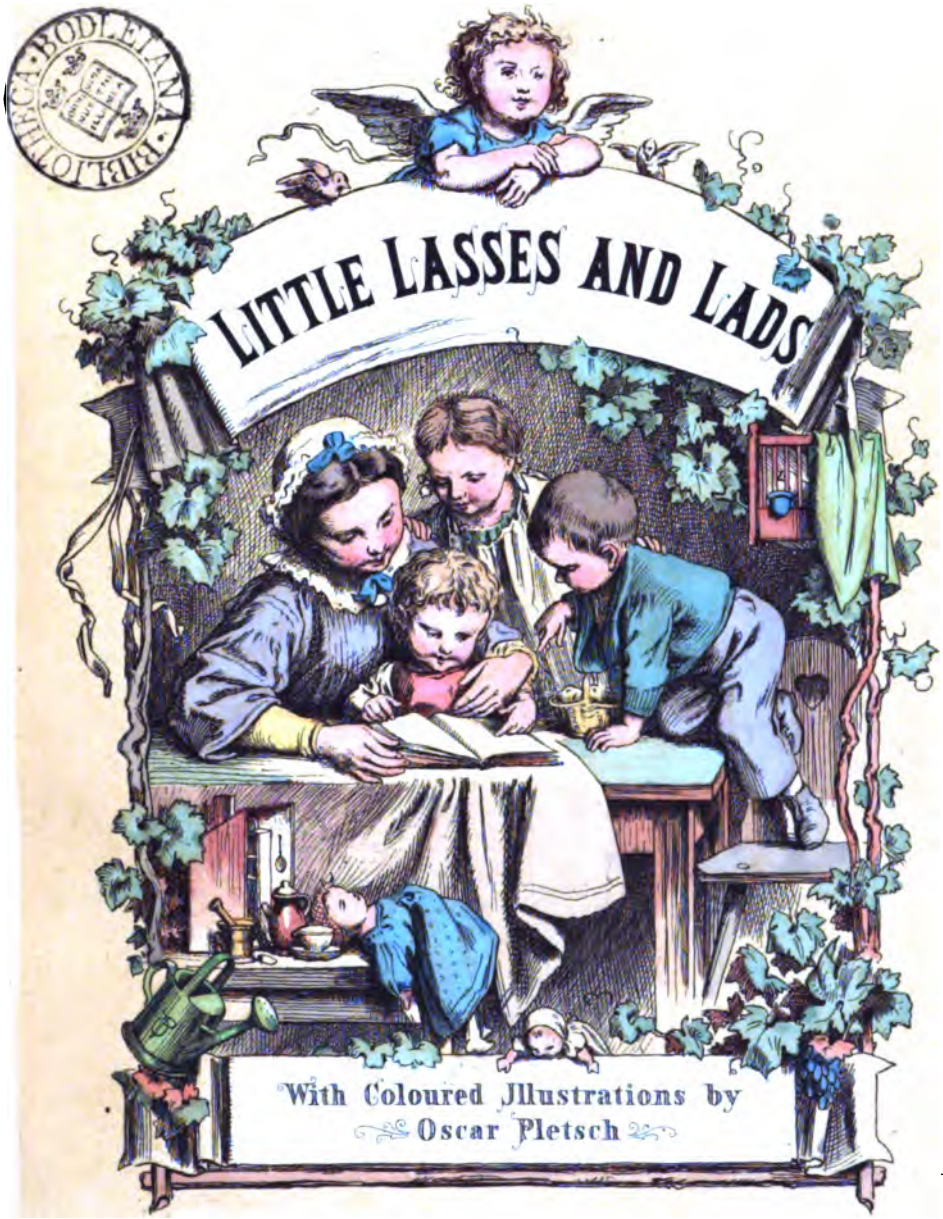
LITTLE LASSES AND LADS

WITH
COLOURED ILLUSTRATIONS
BY
OSCAR PLETSCH


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LITTLE LASSES AND LADS.

CHAPTER I.

RYE FARM.

ARCHIE, you'd better put your bricks back into the box; you won't have time to play with them any more, for I heard papa say, just now, that he was going to order the carriage directly, and we must all be ready in half an hour. Don't you hear me?" repeated little Florence Cooper, peremptorily, seeing that her words produced no impression on her brother, who continued as intent on the erection of a very tall brick tower, as if she had never spoken.

"Don't you hear me?" repeated the little girl, impatiently. "Mamma said we were to get ready at once."

"I'm not going out to-day," was all Archie's reply, "so I needn't get ready."

"Not going out!" exclaimed his sister. "Oh! you mean because of your cold; but we can't help that now, we've all got to go. Don't you know mamma's had a letter from Sissy's governess, to say she's going to bring her home, because she thinks she's got the scarlet fever, and so we three, May, and you, and I, are to go away, for fear we should take it too? That's why papa's ordered the carriage."

This piece of news was sufficiently interesting to draw Master Archie's attention away from his dear bricks. He thrust out his sturdy leg, and demolished his grand tower in a moment, then picking himself up off the floor, he inquired, anxiously, where they were going to.

"Oh, to Nurse Edwards; won't it be fun?" said Florrie, eagerly.

"No," replied the little fellow, resolutely, "I stay at 'ome."

"Oh, but you can't; you'll get the fever too, and perhaps you'd die," urged Florrie, earnestly.

"No, I shan't. I'll stay at 'ome," persisted Archie. "You and May go; I'll stay."

Florrie was about to expostulate further, and urge other arguments, when Mrs. Cooper made her appearance, and was speedily informed by the little girl of Archie's wish to stay at home.

"Unfortunately you can't, Archie," said his mamma, turning towards him. "Papa says you must all go; and though we don't like it at all, there is nothing else to be done, and it is very kind of Nurse to say she will have you."

Archie pouted, and rubbed his fingers into the corners of his eyes to try to make some tears come; but as they were very tiresome, and would not make their appearance, he tried another plan, and began to coax his mamma to let him stay with her. The fact was, Master Archie was not fond of new friends, and the thought of living with Nurse's husband and niece, made him feel very shy. But Mrs. Cooper had no time to listen to his complaints and entreaties, she was busy packing up the children's clothes; and by the time that was done, and their walking things put on, the

carriage and papa were ready to take them to Nurse Edwards.

May and Florrie were too much pleased at the idea of going to stay with their old nurse to feel very sorry at parting with their mamma; but they grew sober and grave when they saw with what an anxious, troubled expression she watched them drive away; she was thinking of the sick child whom she was expecting, more than of the healthy merry little ones she was sending away.

Nurse Edwards, as the children called her, had lived in Mrs. Cooper's family till about six months before this story begins, when she had married and gone to live with her husband at a small farm, about eight miles from the town where they resided. Whenever she came into the town on market days, she always came to have a peep at her little ones, as she still called them; but though they had seen her many times since her marriage, they had never seen her home. It was the prospect of doing this, and of living in a "real farm-house," that had so delighted May and Florence; but Archie, whose ideas of a farm-house were

mostly derived from a toy one he possessed, did not look forward to enjoying himself so much.

However, he was very fond of sitting by his papa's side on the box of the waggonette, and before they had reached their destination he was in as high spirits as his sisters. His shyness returned a little as they drew up in front of the house, and Nurse's husband came out to meet them and help them out. If he had dared, he would have refused to let the good farmer carry him into the farm kitchen; but though he would have liked to kick and scream, he was afraid to do so lest Nurse should be shocked, and, besides, Farmer Edwards was such a very big man that Archie felt as if it would be of no use to kick *him*, he would hardly feel it, especially as Archie had not his very thick pair of boots on. So in a state of mingled awe and shyness our young friend made his entry into Nurse's home, which was a very different place to what he had imagined. But May and Florrie were in ecstasies with everything—with the farmhouse itself, with the great haystacks adjoining it, and, above all, with the many live creatures that

seemed only too ready to form intimate friendships with them. Fortunately, none of the three children were in the least afraid of horses, cows, or dogs, and no sooner had they said good-bye to their papa, and watched him drive away, than they were clamorous to go out and see everything. But Nurse said they must have their dinner first, for she was sure their long drive must have made them hungry. So they sat down to dinner in the kitchen, which Archie and Florrie thought very funny. May coloured very much when she heard them say this, and tried hard to give Florrie a kick under the table, as a hint that such remarks were rude, and might vex dear Nursie; but the table was wide, and poor May's legs were very short, so she was forced to give up the attempt, and trust to Nurse's good-nature to forgive her little brother's and sister's rudeness.

There was not much need to fear that she would be offended by anything her darlings might do; she was so pleased to have them all under her wing again, that I verily believe she would have given them anything they asked. And, indeed, when

Farmer Edwards met them half an hour afterwards making the round of the premises, he said he thought it was a good thing he had found them, or his wife would have given away all his property before tea-time. And no wonder the good man was alarmed, for at the moment he discovered them, Archie was exclaiming, "Nurse, Nurse, the white hen shall be mine, and the big brown one with the trousers shall be May's, and Florrie can have those two pretty ducks." And Florrie was protesting, "No, Nurse, you said I might have the white hen, didn't you?" and Mrs. Edwards was turning from one to the other with a beaming smile, saying, "Yes, dear, you shall have which you like, there are some more white ones, so you can have one apiece, if you like them best."

Nor was it only hens and ducks that the children were begging of their indulgent nurse. Florrie had already bargained for leave to pick as many flowers as she liked, and Archie had inquired anxiously whether there were any ripe strawberries in the garden.

But here the good farmer interposed. "Give

away the ducks and chicks if you like, Sally," he said to his wife; "but don't go for to let that young one make himself ill with stuffing strawberries; sure you that had the care on 'em so long, can rule 'em better than that."

"I don't know, George," replied his wife, "I'm most off my head with having them again, and they do just what they like with me."

"So it seems, so it seems," murmured the farmer to himself; "but I reckon you'll have to look after your head, or the farm work'll go wrong, let alone that them children'll get into mischief if your wits go wool gathering."

How "*them children*" disliked Farmer Edwards when he talked in this way, just as if they were cats or dogs, and didn't know that he was talking about them.

His wife, however, seemed to think he was quite right; and though she was as merry as before, and let the children drag her wherever they liked about the farm, and showed no sign of fatigue or weariness, she was not to be drawn into giving away any more of her husband's property without his

consent. This prudent conduct did not at all suit Master Archie's wishes, and at last he looked up in her face very gravely, and remarked, "Nurse, do you know I like you best when you're off your head; I wish you were always off your head, Nursey," which observation made good Mrs. Edwards laugh very much indeed.

They stayed so long out of doors that when they returned they found Patty, Nurse's little niece who lived with her, getting the table ready for tea. Florrie thought it was very early to have tea; but Nurse said that they always had tea early, because there was so much to do afterwards, and she hoped their walk had given them appetites.

How nice everything tasted in that farm-house! The butter and the bread were so delicious that all the children declared they had never tasted anything like them, and Archie turned his slice round and round taking bites in all directions, and thinking that each corner was nicer than the last; and that splendid milk! what queer taste it was in the farmer to prefer beer to tea with such nice milk in it.

When tea was over, Archie, who had quite for-

gotten all about his shyness, jumped down off the high stool on which he had been perched, crying out, "Nursey, Nursey, may I come and help you put the cows to bed?"

"And I too, I too," cried May and Florrie; "may we come, Nurse?"

"You mean to see them milked, I suppose," said Nurse, laughing. "I don't generally do that, Miss May; but let me see, I can to-night, if you want to see them."

So off they trotted again into the yards where the cows were standing waiting to be milked, having just been driven in from the pasture, by Sam the cow-boy. Two little calves were playing by their mothers, and the children eagerly inquired what their names were. They had no names yet, Mrs. Edwards said, and if they liked, they might choose some names for them. So between watching the milking and talking over this important subject, the time passed away, and when they reached the house again, Archie's eyes were beginning to look very sleepy, and Nurse said she must think about putting him to bed.

Strange to say, however sleepy Archie might be, he never wanted to go to bed. Even at home, he often got into sad trouble by crying and struggling when his nurse tried to undress him; and kind Mrs. Edwards, who knew this well, and was afraid he would be frightened about going to bed in a strange room, was half disposed to let him wait till it was time for his sisters to come too.

But the farmer, who did not understand children very well, and had a decided idea that bed was the very best place for sleepy people, saw no reason at all for waiting for the little girls. He had taken a great fancy to little Florrie, and was amusing himself with asking her questions about her home and parents, and listening to her tales of Jerry, the pony; Minnie, the kitten; and Quiz, the dog; while he rested, after a long day's work, in his arm-chair by the open window, for the evenings were exceedingly warm, and the soft air that came in bringing the scent of honeysuckle and roses was very refreshing.

So Nurse Edwards was obliged to give up her intention, and take Archie off to bed, without

waiting for his sisters. As long as he was in the farmer's sight, Archie made no objection to this proceeding, for he remembered the strong arms that had lifted him out of the carriage, and had a dim idea that they could do what they liked with him. But when he was safely up the narrow staircase, and in the large low room where he was to sleep, Archie gave way to his feelings, first in low sobs, and then in passionate screams; for I must confess that though when he was good he was a very nice little boy indeed, still sometimes Archie could and did make himself very disagreeable. Whether he thought it was very grand to be able to make so much noise, or that he annoyed other people very much by so doing, I cannot say; but in spite of all Mrs. Edwards' attempts to soothe or quiet him, he continued roaring till a heavy step was heard ascending the stair, and the next moment the tall farmer appeared.

At sight of him, Archie's screams ceased in an instant; he stood still with his mouth open, his little face flushed and angry, and his tearful eyes raised half in terror to the good-natured face of

the farmer, who exclaimed, "Hulloa! what's all this about? You'll bring the roof down if you make such a noise as that, little man. Hark! didn't I hear it crack? you see it's rather old, and it wouldn't be altogether pleasant if it came down on your bed in the night, would it now?"

Archie's eyes were now fixed on the ceiling, and certainly there was a long crack along its white-washed surface. Did his screaming really do that? and was the roof really coming down? and would it fall on his bed and crush him in the night? No wonder Archie squeezed close to Nurse, and held her hand tight in both his, as if for safety, for he did not at all like the idea of being crushed in his bed.

Farmer Edwards was amused at the effect his words had produced, and with a broad smile on his face, was turning to go downstairs again, when Archie, recovering a little from his fright, almost shrieked, "Oh! please, please, don't let me sleep in this room. I don't want to be smashed —I don't! I don't!"

"Then don't make such a noise," returned the

farmer, still more amused; "one crack won't make the ceiling fall, but if you go on in that way, we can't tell what may happen."

"Oh! please, I will be good," sobbed Archie; "but let me sleep in another room."

"There, George," said Mrs. Edwards, "you've frightened the child so that I shall never get him to bed quietly now; do go downstairs and leave him to me."

"And how long will you be putting him to bed, I wonder," said the farmer; "you didn't seem to succeed when I was downstairs, so I came to help. Look here, my boy, if so be you'll promise to make no more of that noise, you shall sleep in our room; how will that suit you?"

"Oh! he'll like that," said Nurse, eagerly. "In my room, darling; you shall have your little bed close by the side of mine."

Any room was better than the one where the ceiling was cracked, Archie thought, so he consented to this plan, and the farmer accordingly took up his little iron bedstead, bedding and all, and carried it into another room, where, as there

were no cracks in the ceiling, our little friend was soon sound asleep.

Many little people have a great dislike to going to bed, who have an equally strong objection to getting up. But this was not the case with Archie; he was always awake long before it was time to get up, and being a restless little gentleman, would often spend an hour or so in games with his pillow and sheets, while waiting for his nurse to dress him. But at the farm-house the family rose earlier than Archie was accustomed to; and when the morning sun, shining on his little bed, aroused him from his sleep, Archie was surprised to see that Mrs. Edwards was already dressed.

"Oh, Nurse, may I get up?" was his first exclamation, as, without waiting for an answer, he began to bundle out of bed, pulling all the clothes with him, for he was hardly awake as yet.

"My dear, it is so very early—hardly half-past five. You had better go to sleep again, and I will come and dress you in time for breakfast."

"Oh! but I can't go to sleep again," replied

Archie, with a very dismal face. "Please, Nursey, dress me, and let me come down with you," he added, in a coaxing voice.

So, after some hesitation, Nurse agreed; and, quite happy and contented, Archie trotted downstairs by her side.

"What are you going to do, Nursey?" he asked, when they reached the kitchen.

"I'm going to churn," she replied, "so you had better come into the dairy with me. Wouldn't you like to see the butter made?"

"Very much indeed," Archie said, and he followed her into the cool clean dairy, examining and asking all sorts of questions about the pails of milk, pans of cream, and all the different utensils he saw around him.

But the butter was a long time coming, and Archie soon got tired of asking if it was nearly ready, and wished he might run about the house and have some fun. At last he spied a door at the other end of the dairy to that by which they had entered, and eagerly inquiring where it led to, Mrs. Edwards told him he might open it and see.

The latch was almost too high for Archie to reach, but he stretched his fat little body to the utmost, and, after a good many attempts, succeeded in getting the door open. It led into the yard, and Archie soon gained permission to go out and look about, on condition that he did not go far. It was always very easy to get Archie to promise; but, unfortunately, he did not always remember to keep his word. "My memory so bad," was his constant excuse when reminded of some promise he had broken; but he had learned this speech from an old man who worked as gardener to his father, and used it whenever it suited his convenience, without troubling his head to think whether it was true or not. So delighted was he now to find himself at liberty to roam where he liked, that he never thought any more about his promise to keep near the dairy, and was running hither and thither the next moment in search of adventure. The yards at the back of the house were full of wonders for Archie, and he went singing along in very high spirits; now peering curiously first into one corner, and then into

another, till he came to a huge tub where the pigs' wash was kept. He wondered very much what it was for; but failing to discover, though he smelt, touched, and even tasted it, he wandered on in search of something else as curious. All of a sudden his progress was stopped by a great dog, which, evidently thinking that he was meditating some mischief, bounded up to him, and stood perfectly still very close to him, with his great eyes fixed intently on his face, as much as to say, "What are you doing here?"

Not in the least frightened, Archie stood his ground, and seemed quite as ready as the dog to form an intimate acquaintance. He wondered that Nurse had not introduced them to this nice big dog the day before; but, on second thoughts, he was rather glad she hadn't, for now he could have him all to himself.

"What's your name, Mr. Dog?" he inquired, by way of becoming more friendly.

"Bow wow!" replied the brown dog, not quite so gently as Archie had spoken.

"Yes, I know that," replied Archie; "all



doggies' names are Bow wow; but what's your other name?"

This was more than the brown dog seemed disposed to tell, for he only repeated "Bow wow!" more sharply than before. But Archie was too amicably disposed to be easily offended, so he contented himself with this answer, and putting out his hand to pat the great dog's head, he tried another question, "I am going to see the garden, Mr. Dog," he said; "will you come too?"

"Bow wow, wow, wow, wow!" replied the big dog, throwing his head back, and making such a noise, that Archie thought everybody in the house would wonder what was the matter. If Nurse heard, he was afraid she would call him back and not let him go into the garden. So he determined to give up trying to make friends with the dog, and continue his walk by himself.

"I think you are very cross and rude, and I wish you'd get out of my way, Mr. Dog," he exclaimed, at the same time raising a little stick he had picked up in the yard, as if he intended to strike him.

Now the great brown dog was a very good house-dog, and knew his business far too well ever to let a tramp or beggar pass quietly into his master's premises; but he saw at once that Archie was not a very dangerous person, for the little beggar boys that used often to lurk about the farm-yard, in hopes of being able to run away with a few handfuls of hay, or, what they liked better far, a few apples from the orchard—these little boys never stood still when he barked, but ran away as fast as their legs would carry them. So the brown dog knew that Archie had no thievish intentions, and let him pass without making any objection. But little children were novelties in Nep's eyes, and when the little boy had gone a short distance, it came into the dog's head that it might be as well to follow and see what he was going to do. So he crept quietly along, at a little distance, unperceived by Archie, till they reached the kitchen garden. As long as the child did no further mischief than was the necessary consequence of walking on the beds, where young peas and radishes were growing, Nep did not feel called on to interfere; but when

Archie began making experiments, such as sitting down in the cabbages, to see if they were big enough to hold him, and pulling off the young vegetable marrows, to discover what they tasted like, the dog showed his displeasure by pulling his frock, and barking at him.

"Oh! here you are after all, Mr. Dog," said Archie, when he saw that Nep had followed him; "but let me alone, you'll tear my frock."

Nep seemed to think the frock was of less consequence than his master's vegetables, and continued to pull without letting go for a moment, till Archie, growing angry, wrenched himself free with great difficulty, and set out to run away from his tormenter, dashing right over a bed where some young plants were growing under the shelter of glasses. Now Nep knew quite well that this was forbidden ground, and accordingly determined to chase the young rogue off it; while Archie, finding himself pursued, quickened his pace, till his foot slipped and he fell over one of the glass frames, smashing it all to pieces under him. Nep's wrath and indignation seemed to vanish directly he

saw what had happened. He walked round and round the child, licking his face as if to comfort him; for Archie did not attempt to rise, but lay still where he had fallen, screaming with pain and fright. He had cut his arm and face a good deal, and when he saw the blood flowing, Nep seemed quite at a loss what to do. At first he tried to encourage Archie to get up; but as he was either unable or unwilling to move, the dog solved the difficulty by taking a firm hold of his clothes with his teeth, and setting off to carry him towards the house. Archie was so surprised, that he made no resistance, and when Nep laid his burden down, and waited to rest, which he did every few yards, he lay quite still till the dog took him up again.

In this way Archie reached the dairy-door, where the dog laid him down, for Nep dared not cross the threshold, even though engaged in such a benevolent action. But Mrs. Edwards heard him coming, and turning hastily round to order him to keep out, she was startled to see what he was carrying. In an instant her butter was for-

gotten, and Archie was in her arms. The poor bleeding arms were wiped and kissed, and, pitying and caressing him, Mrs. Edwards carried him into the kitchen to warm him and doctor him; while Nep, satisfied that it was all right now, trotted off about his business.

CHAPTER II.

MAY'S ACCIDENT.

ARCHIE'S first day at the farm did not seem likely to be a very happy one; for though the cuts on his arms and face ceased to pain him much, after Mrs. Edwards had bathed and bound them up, the farmer was so convinced by this accident that he was too young and too mischievous to be trusted to take care of himself, that, before he left the house that morning, he made his wife promise that she would not let him go outside the door, till she was ready to go with him.

"The next thing will be, he'll get into the field, and be tossed by that rampageous bull, and what will his parents say then? No, wife, depend upon it, children haven't much more sense than four-footed animals, and want as much looking after as a flock of sheep—if not more, for sheep be more

silly than mischievous." And so saying, the farmer went off to his work.

Unfortunately for Archie, Mrs. Edwards happened to be particularly busy that morning, and had little time to attend to him; so he sat on a little stool in the kitchen, or played with the cat till dinner-time, while his sisters, whom the farmer considered much more sensible and steady, went out into the fields with little Patty to look for wild flowers, and play in the newly-mown hay.

Mrs. Edwards wondered that he did not cry and grumble at his hard fate; but Archie had made one discovery, and that was, that crying did not produce any effect on the farmer, and, so like a wise boy, he resolved to try what being very good would do.

Mrs. Edwards was delighted with his behaviour, and when her husband came in to dinner, she lost no time in telling him that he was quite mistaken in thinking that Archie was a mischievous, troublesome boy, for he had been as good as gold all the morning, as quiet and obedient as a lamb.

The farmer laughed, and told his wife that if

she would promise that the boy would be equally good with him, he would take him with him to see some of the hay carried that afternoon; for he thought there were some ugly clouds getting up, and he meant to get it in as fast as he could.

Archie was very pleased at this news, though he would rather have gone with anybody else; but, as Mrs. Edwards was busy, and Patty was not thought old enough to take care of him, there was no one else to go, so he made up his mind to trust himself with the farmer, and was eager in his promises to be very good.

May and Florrie, having spent the whole morning in the hay-fields, were too tired to go out again, so they ran to fetch the dolls that they had brought with them, and amused themselves, very happily and quietly, for some time in the old kitchen. As long as she had her doll, Florrie was generally happy and contented; but May, being two years older than her sister, and of course much wiser, after a time began to weary of dressing and undressing it, talking to it, and answering her own questions.

"I wish," she said to her sister, "people would invent dolls with some sense in them; I get so sick of talking to a thing that never answers."

"Do you?" said little Florrie; "but you know, May, that if it were a baby it couldn't answer you."

"Well, babies haven't much sense, I suppose," replied May, after having considered this remark for a few moments. "But, at any rate, they don't always look exactly the same. Now, if I kiss this doll, she stares at me as if she didn't know what I meant; and if I beat and scold her, she looks just as if she didn't care: it *is* so provoking." And May gave vent to her feelings by shaking the offending doll, till its flaxen ringlets were all in disorder.

"If it were a baby," replied Florrie, slowly and thoughtfully, "I suppose it would cry when you beat it; well, I shouldn't like that at all. I'm glad mine is a doll, and not a baby."

"If I beat it, I would rather it did cry, it would show it had got some sense," persisted May. "Well, I shan't play with this stupid thing any

more. I'm going to run about the house and see what is to be seen."

"Then, may I have your doll too?" inquired Florrie, eagerly, "that will be such fun."

"Yes, if you like," answered May, rather contemptuously, as she began to climb the steep stairs that led to the upper part of the house. She thought her sister was very silly to care so much for such childish things as dolls; but then Florrie was not much more than a baby after all—was she not two whole years younger than May? and surely two years must make a great deal of difference.

May thought a good deal of those two years that separated her from Florrie, and often made people laugh by speaking of herself as nearly grown up, while she called Florrie and Archie "the children."

So when Mrs. Cooper had told them all at parting, that she hoped they would be good children, and not give Nurse any trouble, it had never entered May's silly little pate, that her mamma could possibly mean her; such a charge, of course, could only apply to Florrie and Archie. In like

manner, when Nurse had left them in the kitchen together, bidding them be sure they did not get into mischief, May had answered quite readily, "Oh yes, Nurse, I'll take care of Florrie," never thinking that Nurse had any fears for her.

Poor silly little May! how she wished, afterwards, she had stayed in the kitchen with Florrie.

The farm-house was an old-fashioned, rambling kind of place, with steep stairs, and windows built in all sorts of funny places. Most of the rooms were low, and May amused herself with climbing on chairs and tables, to see if she could not touch the ceiling; but she was not so tall as she fancied herself. So, after three or four attempts, she gave up the idea, and looked round for some new amusement. She had wandered into Mrs. Edwards' room, which was very plainly furnished—so plainly, that nothing attracted May's attention, except a huge deep cupboard, which seemed so big, that the child could not help fancying that something wonderful must be hidden inside. The door was locked, but the key was in the key-hole, and May tried to turn it. The lock was stiff, and for some

minutes resisted the weak little hand that held the key; but the more difficult it seemed, the more May was determined to find out what was inside, though all the while a little voice within was telling her that she had no business to pry into Mrs. Edwards' cupboards.

At last the door came open, and what was May's disappointment to discover that this mysterious-looking closet contained nothing more wonderful than some old boxes and baskets, and some of Nurse's gowns, which were hung on pegs on the walls. The lid of one of the boxes was raised; evidently Nurse had left it so by mistake, or when called away in a hurry, for some work had been thrown hastily in, without any order or arrangement, which was very different from Mrs. Edwards' usual tidy ways. Among this heap, May perceived a bonnet only half made, and instantly a new idea came into her head. She had often wondered how she should look in a bonnet—for, of course, as she was so nearly grown up, she would have one soon—and here was a capital opportunity of trying one on, and examining her-



self in the looking-glass without interruption. So, though the bonnet was in such an unfinished state, that she was uncertain which was the back and which the front of it, she was soon dressed in it, and in a scarf, which she had also found in the box, turning and twisting herself round before the glass, that she might see how the bonnet suited her behind, as well as in front. I don't know how many more things she would have tried on, had she not been startled by a sudden noise, which made her strip herself, in all haste, of her borrowed finery, lest Nurse should come up and catch her in the act of meddling with her things. This fright, though it was only caused by the cat, which had followed her upstairs, made her think that, perhaps, it was not quite right to touch other people's things; so she hastily replaced them in the box, and, shutting and locking the cupboard door, ran out of the room, half thinking she would go back to Florrie in the kitchen. But, unfortunately for her good resolutions, her curiosity was again excited by the sight of a very narrow flight of steps, which she fancied must lead out on to the roof.

"I must see where they go to," she said to herself, "and then I'll go back to the kitchen." So she climbed the narrow steps, till she reached what she thought was another room; it was full of all sorts of curious things, of which May did not know the names or use. But this only excited her curiosity still more, and she determined to go in, though the room was low and dark, and there were rafters and beams across the floor.

At first she stepped carefully from one beam to another; but at last, without looking where she was going, she gave a jump, her foot slipped, and seemed to turn under her, as she fell at full length, screaming with pain.

At first she thought she had broken her leg, for, when she tried to rise, it hurt her so, that she could not help screaming again. But then she found the pain was all in her foot, and she thought she must have broken off some of her toes; she counted them; but no, they were all there safe and sound. Still, she was sure she had broken something, and how was she to get down out of that horrid place? She must call Nurse, and yet

she did not want Nurse to find her there, for, perhaps, she would be angry, and say she ought to have stayed in the kitchen. May knew she should have done so, and with all her heart she wished she had. Still, there was no help for it now; so she set to work to call Nurse, hoping that she would hear her, and come before the farmer came in; for May felt sure he would say she had no business up in the loft. But Mrs. Edwards was busy in the wash-house, and though May called with all her might, no answer came for a long, long time. At last she left off calling, and began to cry, for her foot was growing so painful, she did not know what to do; she began to think she should never make them hear, and perhaps she should be left to starve up in the loft, for she was sure she should never be able to get down till her foot got well.

An hour passed in this dismal way. May thought it would soon be tea-time, and, perhaps, they would come to look for her. At last she heard Florrie's little voice, at the foot of the kitchen stairs, calling her name. May tried to

answer, but this time nothing but sobs came. Then she heard the farmer's voice speaking to Florrie, and then his heavy step coming up the stairs. He was whistling as he came, and May hoped he was not coming to look for her; for, she thought, she would rather stay there all night, than that he should find her there. But the next minute she heard Florrie speaking to him, and telling him she could not think where May had gone to; and then the farmer stood still and called her name. May dared not keep silence any longer; so in a frightened voice, half choked with sobs, she answered, "Oh! please, Mr. Edwards, I'm up here. I can't get down; I've hurt my foot."

"She's up in the loft, I do declare, Florrie," exclaimed the farmer; "what can she be doing up there? but we must go and see."

Florrie had a dim idea that a loft was a very dreadful place; so she showed no inclination to accompany the farmer, when he prepared to climb the ladder by which May had found her way into the loft. "Please, Mr. Edwards, I'll

stay here," she said, "and you'll bring May down as fast as you can, won't you?"

"She'll be down in a trice," said the farmer, as his huge figure disappeared through the trap-door. "Now, little miss" (his words were now addressed to May), "where's the damage? and how did you get it?"

"My foot slipped, and I fell," sobbed May; "and, oh! I am sure I've broken something."

"Well, we can't mend it up here," replied the farmer, "so we must get down." And May was obliged to submit to being lifted up, and carried slowly and carefully down the ladder, at the bottom of which Florrie received her with rapture.

But the farmer stalked on till he reached the kitchen, which was empty; for Archie had gone to the laundry to talk to Nurse, and tell her all that had happened in the hay-fields, and Patty was also there.

He put May down very tenderly in the large arm-chair, which always stood in the chimney corner, and then shouted to his wife, who came hurriedly in; for, since Archie's accident in the morning,

she had been feeling very nervous and anxious, whenever the children were out of her sight. May's tears at once told her that she was the cause of the summons; but she looked at her husband for an explanation.

"Two of them to hurt themselves in one day, is more than I bargained for when I said I'd house them," he remarked, bluntly. "It'll be little Florrie to-morrow, I suppose, unless you or I take a holiday, and follow them about all day. This one had got up in the loft, and slipped, and hurt her foot—sprained it, I suppose; but you'd better look to it."

This Mrs. Edwards lost no time in doing; but May winced and cried so much whenever her foot was touched, that the good woman was quite at a loss to tell what mischief was done.

"You'd better send Sam for the doctor," she said to her husband; "I can't tell whether there's any bone broken, or whether it's a sprain; anyhow, it will do no harm to have the doctor."

"It's nought but a sprain," replied her husband; but he did as he was requested, and despatched

the stable-boy to fetch the doctor, who lived not far off, and, happening to be at home, returned in a few minutes with the lad.

Mrs. Edwards was greatly relieved when he pronounced it to be only a sprain, and the farmer did not seem particularly sorry when the doctor gave positive orders that May should not be allowed to walk for several days, saying the only thing to cure a sprained ankle was perfect rest. "Put her on a sofa, and keep her there," he said, as he took his leave; and the farmer muttered to himself, "And there she'll be pretty safe, unless she manages to tumble off and break her head."

CHAPTER III.

A QUIET EVENING.

BUT in spite of his rough way of speaking, Farmer Edwards had a kind heart, and the sad little faces that met his gaze, when he returned to the kitchen, made him speedily relent towards the children; and he set himself at once to the task of making May comfortable on the little couch, which usually stood in the sitting-room, but was now moved into the kitchen, that the child might not be shut out from all the busy life of the farm.

Archie and Florrie had stood by, watching and listening with very grave faces; for to be condemned to lie still on the sofa for several days, seemed a very dreadful thing in their eyes, and they could not discover what their sister had done to make it necessary. Archie, who never remained longer in doubt upon any subject than he could

possibly avoid, would have questioned May as to what had happened, had not Mrs. Edwards interfered, and stopped him by saying, "There, my dear, never mind about that just now, your sister would rather not be talked to, while her foot pains her so much; when I have done bathing her ankle, I am going to put a fresh piece of rag round the cut on your arm, and then we'll all have tea."

This gentle reminder of his own misdemeanours, prevented Archie from making any further remarks on May's accident; and he waited quietly till it was his turn to be doctored.

Then he could restrain his curiosity no longer; but, looking up in Nurse's face, he said, "Isn't it funny, two of us should hurt ourselves on the same day, Nursie? we don't often hurt ourselves at home."

"No, because you mind what your mamma tells you, and so you don't run into danger," replied Nurse, gravely.

"But, Nursie, I didn't know there was any danger, or I wouldn't have run among the cab-

bages," replied Archie; "and, perhaps, May didn't know she would get hurt, when she got into the loft."

"Very likely not; but if you had kept your promise, and not gone out of the yard, you wouldn't have fallen over the glass and hurt yourself; if little children are disobedient, they are sure to get into trouble."

"Are they," said Archie, opening his eyes very wide. "I do be naughty sometimes at home, but I never cut myself before."

"There are other ways of getting into trouble, besides cutting yourself," replied Nurse, gravely.

"Like May," replied Archie. "Nursie, did she hurt her foot because she was disobedient?"

"Never mind about May, she is older than you are; and if she is naughty, it is no business of yours."

Archie was somewhat abashed at this remark, and he replied, rather sulkily, "I only wanted to know; 'cause May says, sometimes, it is only us children who are naughty, and I think she is, too, sometimes."

"Perhaps she is," replied Nurse; "but I don't like little boys to talk about their sisters' faults; it isn't nice at all. And now we have talked enough about that, so we'll have some tea."

The evening passed away very peacefully; for the farmer, who was very fond of children, notwithstanding all he said about the trouble they gave, kept them thoroughly amused and happy by telling them stories of his boyish days, and of the games that he and his brothers and sisters used to play at when they were children, in the very farm-house that now belonged to him.

"And were you ever as little as me?" inquired Archie, looking with wonder at the tall figure before him. "You were never *quite* as little as me, were you?"

"Well, I suspect I was," replied the farmer; "but it's a good while ago, you see."

"Then shall I be as big as you, some time or other?" asked the boy, looking at his own small person, and pulling himself up to his full height.

"Well, I can't tell as to that; maybe you will, maybe you won't; it don't much signify either way."

Archie considered this remark for some minutes, then returning to the subject that had been uppermost in his thoughts all day, he inquired whether the farmer had ever broken a glass and cut himself, when he was a little boy of his size.

The farmer laughed, and said he couldn't remember to have done such a thing; and he thought, if he had, his father would scarcely have failed to have done something to make him remember it. So, on the whole, he should consider that such an accident could hardly have happened to him.

Archie grew very red at this remark; for the injury he had himself received, had made him feel of so much consequence, that he had scarcely thought at all about the glass he had broken; and now he began to wonder whether he ought to pay for it, and to consider how much it was likely to cost.

"Mr. Edwards," he said, after a few moments' silence, "I've got sixpence of my own, will that pay for the glass I broke? It's all I've got, you see."

Both the farmer and his wife laughed so heartily,

that Archie, who thought their mirth was occasioned by the idea of sixpence being enough to pay for the glass, began to feel very uncomfortable. Indeed, I am not sure if he was not on the point of crying, when Nurse, perceiving his distress, exclaimed, as she snatched him up, and covered him with kisses,

"The idea of your thinking you'd got to pay for the old glass, my darling; well, I think you paid pretty well for it, with all the cuts you got. Don't you, Edwards?"

"But they won't buy another, and Joe said the little green thing wouldn't grow without a glass to keep out the cold," said Archie, dismally. "I shouldn't like it to die."

"No," said little Florrie, gravely; "it would be like murder."

"Or manslaughter," put in May; "because Archie didn't mean to do it."

"But it wasn't a man, it was a little flower," corrected Florrie.

"Oh! that's all the same," replied May; "they call it manslaughter if it's a woman or a child."

"The children will kill me, that's certain, wife," said the farmer, who had been in fits of laughter during this discussion. "Murder and manslaughter, how come they to know what such words mean?"

"May reads the newspapers," replied Florrie, "and she tells us stories out of them when we're in bed."

"Well, I never!" said the farmer, in amazement. "And does your mother know?"

"Know what?" said Florrie; "that May reads the papers. Oh, yes; but she doesn't mind, because—may I tell, May?—because, you see, perhaps May will be a judge when she grows up."

"A what?" exclaimed the farmer.

"A judge," replied May, colouring to the roots of her hair. "I heard a lady say, one day, to mamma, that there would be lady lawyers, and lady judges, soon; so I mean to be a judge."

"I should think the lady had come out of Bedlam," Nurse remarked, while her husband inquired,

"And you, Miss Florrie, what are you going to be?"

"I don't know," Florrie remarked, timidly. "I should like to be like mamma—stay at home, and take care of the house and children; but May says that gentlemen will do that, if ladies are to do the other things."

"Of course somebody must do them," said May, "and perhaps men could, if they were taught; though, I daresay, they'd be rather stupid at first."

"But I don't see," said the farmer, slowly, as if he was pondering the matter deeply—"I don't justly see, Miss May, why any such changes need be made."

May was rather puzzled at this question, and had a faint idea that the farmer was laughing at her, so she replied, rather crossly, that she supposed men were more stupid than they used to be, or women cleverer, or something of that sort, which only amused Mr. Edwards still more.

Archie had not made many remarks during this conversation, for he had been growing rather sleepy; but May's last observation roused him, and he said, sharply, "I'm sure men don't grow

stupider; it's girls that are stupid. I'm much wiser than I used to be—mamma says so."

Florrie and May laughed heartily at this speech, and said they thought Archie was very conceited; but Nurse interposed, and said that when children began to say rude things, she always knew it was time for them to go to bed. So, though he was very reluctant, Archie was obliged to submit to be led off to bed; and very soon after, May declaring that she was dreadfully tired and sleepy, both the little girls followed his example, and so ended their second day at the farm.

But though May had longed for bed, when lying on the not very soft sofa, she soon grew tired of it, when she found that it did not, as usual, bring sleep with it. Her foot still pained her considerably, though it had become much easier, since it had been bathed in cold water; nor was her mind quite at rest. Nurse's answer to Archie's remark, that he thought she was sometimes as naughty as other people, had roused some uneasy feelings. Darkness and stillness often give rise to thoughts which seldom trouble us in broad daylight; and

May began to wonder, first, whether Nurse really thought she was not the pattern child she had loved to fancy herself; and next, whether it could be true that she was sometimes as naughty as Florrie and Archie.

If so, perhaps that was the reason she had hurt her foot; she remembered how frightened she had felt, lest Nurse should catch her in the act of trying on her bonnet, and it was impossible to deny that, if she had not been doing wrong, she would have had no reason to be frightened.

Having come to this conclusion, May felt very uncomfortable. Hitherto, she had always considered herself a very good little person, on the whole—obedient, gentle, well-mannered, a good sister, and a particularly good little daughter. Now this pleasant picture was damaged: for, certainly, it was not polite or proper for a visitor to pry into her host's boxes and cupboards, as she had been doing that day; nor was it acting the part of a good sister, to set Florrie and Archie such an example as she had done.

"Oh, dear!" moaned May, to herself; "my

foot hurts so, and I'm so worried, I don't know what to do."

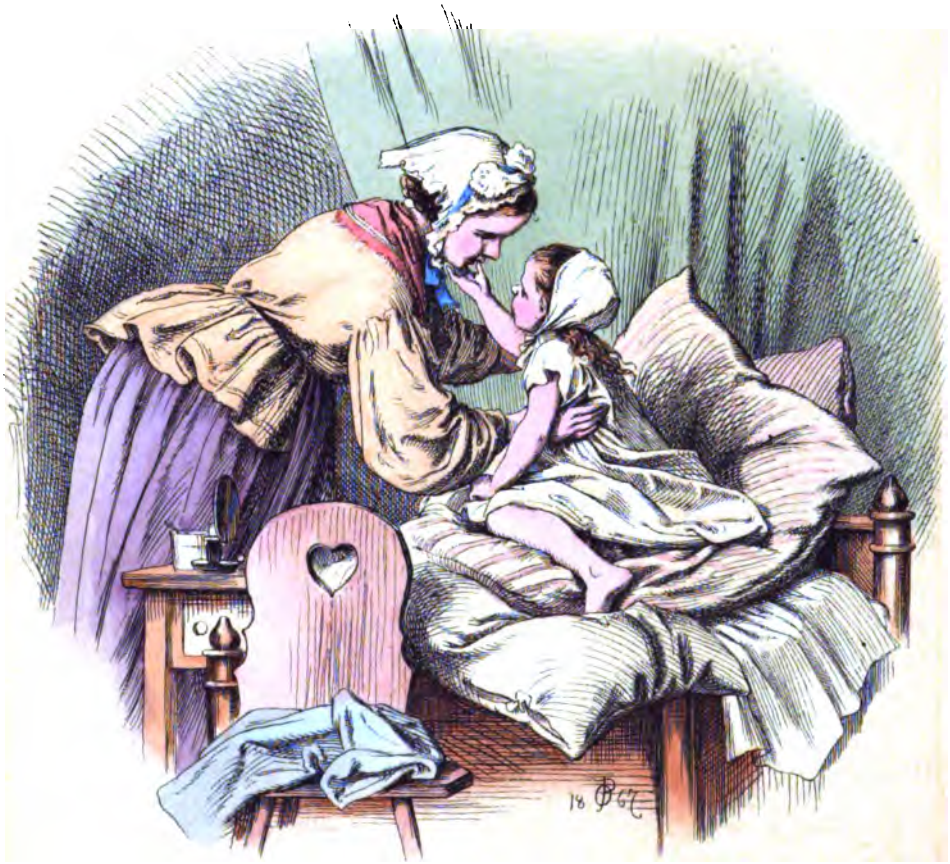
"What's the matter, dear?" said Nurse's kind voice; "can't you get to sleep?"

May had not heard the door open, or discovered that Mrs. Edwards, who was undressing in the next room, had heard her dismal exclamation, and come to see what was the matter; but, suddenly remembering that a fault confessed is half redressed, she determined to tell everything to her old nurse.

Mrs. Edwards readily forgave her, and promised to say nothing about her misdemeanours to Florrie or Archie, though she said she should have to tell her husband, for he was so curious to know how May's accident had happened, that he would be sure to ask her if she knew?

Then she made the bed again, for May had been tossing about so much, that it was in a most uncomfortable condition; and kissing and comforting her, she laid her down again, bidding her try to go to sleep.

May thanked her, and nestled herself in the



pillows, feeling much happier than she had been before, and hoping, with all her heart, that Mr. Edwards would forget to ask his wife any questions about her visit to the loft.

But in this hope she was disappointed. The next morning, while the children were eating their breakfasts, Mrs. Edwards said that she thought they would not find the days so long, or be so likely to get into mischief, if they learned one lesson every morning, while she was washing up the breakfast things.

The farmer thought it was a very good idea; but not so the children.

"Nursie," said Florrie, with a very grave face, "we didn't bring our books with us, because mamma said you'd have no time to teach us."

"There are Bibles and hymn-books here," said Nurse, quietly; "you can learn a verse out of the Bible, and a verse of a hymn every morning, Miss Florrie. All good little children like to learn Bible verses."

There was no possibility of contradicting this, so Florrie and May were silent; but Archie de-

clared, stoutly, that he couldn't learn lessons, because he couldn't read.

"I daresay Miss May will teach you a verse," replied Nurse; "or I can while I am drying the breakfast cups." And so it was all arranged.

"Sally," said the farmer, when the children's complaints were over, "in my young days there was a bit of poetry that wouldn't come amiss to some people we know, about a young lady that wanted to know the reason of everything—why the steam came out of the kettle; what there was in the teapot that made such nice tea; what her grandmother's spectacles were like; and what the old lady kept in her snuff-box. Do you know the thing I mean?"

"No, George," replied Nurse; "but what was the harm in the young lady wanting to know such things?"

"No harm at all, supposing she'd asked some sensible person who could tell her," replied the farmer; "but that's just what she didn't—she must find out everything for herself; and the consequence was, the spectacles were broken, and

the snuff made her sneeze, till—till—well, I don't know how long—till she grew a wiser girl, I suppose. But, you see, we know by experience that worse things might have happened."

"I wonder whether Simmons knows that you want the horse put into the spring-cart at once," remarked Mrs. Edwards, to change the subject. "I think Patty had better run and tell him."

"No, I'll go myself," said the farmer, rising; "I want to speak to him about Grey Bess, she went rather lame yesterday."

"Well, then, take Archie with you; he's always wanting to see the horses, and I can't be always going to the stable with him."

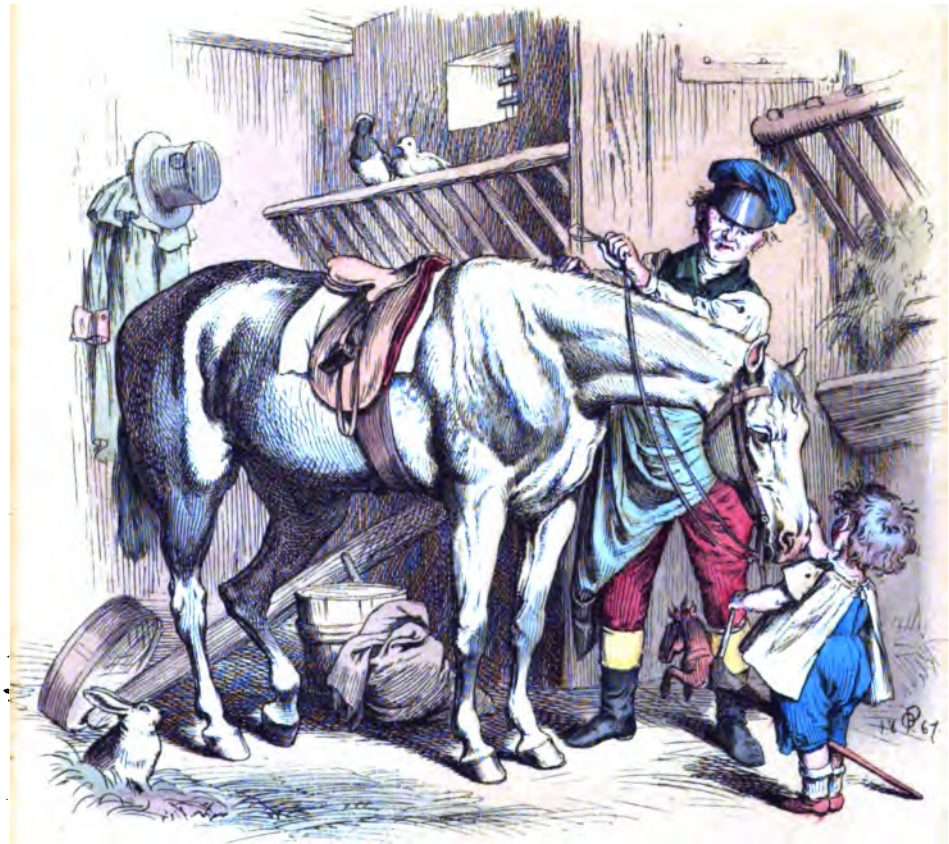
"All right," said the farmer; and Archie slipped down from his high chair, and scampered off in front of the farmer, forgetting that he wanted very much to know what May was looking so red and uncomfortable about.

CHAPTER IV.

MANY FRIENDS.

ARCHIE had by this time quite got over his aversion to the good farmer, and thought nothing more delightful than to go with him to see the gee-gees, with his own gee-gee—a wooden horse, or rather a horse's head, between his legs.

Grey Bess was also his particular favourite, because she always stooped her head to speak to him when he came near her, and she was so quiet, that sometimes the farmer let him have a ride on her back. But the horses, though his especial friends, were not the only acquaintances he had in the stable; there were, as Archie said, all sorts of things that liked living there better than in their own houses. Two pigeons, which for some reason which they kept to themselves, had deserted the pigeon-house, and taken up their abode



in the stable; one or two rabbits, who, in like manner, seemed to object to the society of their own kind, had escaped from their hutch, and now ran about, quite fearlessly, among the horses' legs, eating all manner of things that were never intended for them, and leading, on the whole, a very prosperous life.

Archie thought they were very sensible creatures, to like the large stable better than their own hutch; and he now told the farmer, gravely, that if he had his own way, he should certainly follow their example.

The farmer laughed, and said, Very well, he would tell his wife to move Archie's bed into the stable.

But this was not what Archie meant; for, however bold and fearless he might be in broad daylight, he was by no means over brave when night came. Accordingly, he explained that what he wanted was to spend the whole day with Simmons, and help him to take care of the horses; and so earnestly did he entreat, that the farmer was on the point of consenting, thinking that Simmons,

who was an old servant, and did very little work, might as well take care of the child as not, when Archie spoilt his own cause, by imprudently revealing what had made him so anxious to spend the day in the stable.

"If I stay with Simmons," said the child, innocently, "I will be so good—I won't break anything; I'll only play with the rabbits, and pull the horses' tails, and then Nursie won't have to teach me at all."

"Oh, oh!" said the farmer; "that's it, is it. You like playing with rabbits better than learning texts; but what would Nurse say to that?"

"Please, sir," said Simmons, for they had reached the stable by this time, "I think as how I'd better take this 'ere horse to the blacksmith, this mornin'; so I can't werry wull look after the child."

"No; of course not," said his master. "No, Archie, it will never do not to have your lessons; 'All play, no work, makes Jack an idle Turk,' you know."

Archie made no reply; but wished, with all his heart, that he had said nothing about his lessons;

it would have been so very nice to have gone with Grey Bess and Simmons to the village, so very much nicer than staying in-doors and learning lessons. However, another idea came into his head, which was almost equally nice. Farmer Edwards was going somewhere in the cart; why shouldn't he go, too? there was plenty of room for him, and he had never ridden in a cart in all his life. It was a chance not to be lost.

"Oh, please, please, Mr. Edwards," said the child, eagerly, "I do so wish—I should so like to go with you in the cart! Mayn't I? oh, please let me!"

"But the lessons, my boy—you've forgotten them again; the cart and I are going directly, and your lessons are not done."

"The cart isn't fastened to the horse yet," said Archie, in desperation; "if I run back, I can learn a text, before it's ready. Oh, do let me, Mr. Edwards!"

The good-natured farmer could not resist this appeal, so he consented, saying that he would wait a quarter of an hour, and if Archie could

learn a text in that time, he might go with him.

Almost before the words were well out of his mouth, Archie was running at full speed towards the house, and before ten minutes had elapsed, he was back again, panting for breath, but radiant with delight, and only regretting that, as Florrie had not yet begun her lessons, she could not go too.

What a splendid drive that was, to be sure! Archie wondered that everybody did not drive about in spring-carts, they were so much nicer than carriages; and then he wondered why everybody did not live at farm-houses, they were so much pleasanter than the houses in the town. In short, there was no end to his wonderings, nor to his questions either. The farmer said, when he got home, that he didn't know when he had talked so much as he had that morning, positively he felt quite done up. Archie, however, seemed none the worse for his exertions. He was in even higher spirits than when he set out, and chattered on, without ceasing, to May and Florrie, about all

that he had seen and heard during his drive; for, thanks to Nurse's care, May's foot was already far less painful, and she was quite ready to listen to and enjoy any tidings of what was happening out of doors. It seemed very hard to have to lie still all day long, and miss so much of what her brother and sister were able to see; but May had made up her mind to try and be patient, and she succeeded far better than she had expected. Nurse had found a quantity of bright coloured wool, and had taught her to make it into soft balls, which pleased Archie and Florrie wonderfully, and delighted the cat still more.

It would never do for me to tell you all that happened every day during the six weeks that the little Coopers stayed at Rye Farm; for though people of their age do not get up very early, nor go to bed very late, still, as there are forty-two days in six weeks, and each day is at least twelve hours long, if I were to tell you everything that happened in all those many hours, I am sure it would make a book much too long for you to read.

You will want to know, perhaps, whether they did not sometimes long very much to see their papa and mamma, from whom they were now separated for the first time. Sometimes I think they did; and once, when Archie had been in a naughty temper all day—for such things did happen sometimes—he said he wished he was at home, for he was always a much *gooder* boy when he was with his mamma.

Still, altogether they had a very happy time; and the farmer said it made him feel as if he were a boy again, when he heard their little merry voices about the house, reminding him, as they often did, of the days when he had played with his brothers and sisters in the same rooms, many years before.

Sundays were very happy days at the farm, though Archie had at first concluded, after due consideration, that they would be very different from the Sundays at home. It was on the first Saturday after their arrival, as they were all seated around the great table at tea, that he had inquired, rather anxiously, "Nursie, are there Sundays

here?" to which Nurse had replied, "To be sure, dear; why do you ask?"

"Oh! because—" Archie had replied, and then, as if at a loss for an answer, he stopped short; "because there's no church, you know."

"Oh yes, there is," Nurse replied; "only it's a long way off. We go there in the cart."

"In the cart," sounded very delightful to Archie and Florrie; but May had not yet made up her mind whether it would be quite proper for her, who was so nearly grown up, and a young lady, to drive in a common cart; but while she was still thinking about it, her little brother continued, "And that's all, isn't it, Nurse?"

"All what?" Nurse inquired, while the farmer at the same time exclaimed, "What does the child mean?"

"I mean," said Archie, growing very red, and trying to speak very distinctly, "at home, on Sundays, papa doesn't go to his office, and mamma doesn't work, or go out to see people, or do anything; but here you must feed the horses and pigs, or they'd die, and you must look after the

sheep and cows, or they'd run away; so there can't be Sundays here."

"Well," said the farmer, laughing, "they do say children are different from what they used to be, and I think it's true; for I know, for certain, that when I was his size, I never gave such things a thought."

"No, no," said his wife, earnestly, "don't laugh at the child, George; but tell him all about it."

"Well, let's see," said the farmer; "what is it you want to know, Archie—how we keep the Lord's Sabbath? Well, I'll tell you then. You're pretty right when you say it ain't so easy for us country folks as for them as live in towns; for, as your nurse said, we haven't a church next door to walk into, so we're forced to use a horse, which I don't like. But he's the only beast that does any work on my farm on Sundays, and he keeps his Sabbath the day before, to be ready like; and to be sure it's all the same to him which day it is."

"Yes; because he doesn't go to church," said Archie, who was listening attentively.

"And for the other beasts, they rest as I do, for they are God's creatures every bit as much; there's no ploughing or work for them on Sundays."

"But I meant you, and Simmons, and Joe," said Archie; "you have to feed them, and look after them, haven't you?"

"To be sure; and, for the matter of that, your mother has to look after and feed you on Sundays as much as other days. I reckon it ain't the will of God that either children or brute beasts should be made uncomfortable on Sundays, any more than week-days. You'll see to-morrow, Master Archie, that the little care they want doesn't give us much trouble."

Accordingly, Archie did see, very much to his satisfaction, that there were Sundays at Rye Farm as well as at home, and yet that neither the horses nor pigs were any the worse off in consequence. In the morning there was the delightful drive in the cart to church—such a tiny church it was, but the children liked it all the better on that account; because, as Florrie observed, it was so cosy, and all the people were so close together.

And then there was the drive back again, just in time for the early farm dinner—always a cold dinner on Sunday, that there might be no more work on the day of rest than could be helped.

Afternoon service was early, so that there was not much time to spare after dinner, before the strong horse trotted round to the door again, and they were once more packed into the cart, and away to church. But when they reached home again, there was, as Archie observed, some work to be done. With his hand in the farmer's, he accompanied him on his round to visit all the farm creatures, while Florrie went with Mrs. Edwards to see her milk the cows. But these jobs were soon despatched, and, when tea was over, what the children thought the pleasantest part of the day began.

A little boy from the village, the orphan grandchild of old Simmons, was in the habit of spending the Sunday evenings at the farm, where Mrs. Edwards read to him the Bible stories, and taught him verses and hymns. But May could remember a large old book, that Nurse used to possess, with

some wonderful pictures in it, and she begged that they might have it again, and that Mrs. Edwards would read it to them once more. So the old copy of Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress was brought down from the book-shelf, and with Archie on her knees, and the little girls, and little Daniel around her, Nurse read to them scraps, which she thought they could understand, of the wonderful dream, which made them all wish they dreamt such curious things, and wonder very much that Bunyan could remember it all well enough to write it down when he awoke.

Archie was never tired of looking at the picture at the beginning, which represented John Bunyan asleep; but Florrie liked better to look at Christian losing his burden at the foot of the cross, which was the part of the story which the children seemed to understand best of all. This wonderful book would have lasted them many more Sunday evenings, than the six which they passed at Rye Farm; for all their favourite parts were eagerly demanded over and over again, and enjoyed still more at every repetition.

CHAPTER V.

THE DUCK POND.

FROM the first day of his stay at the farm, when Archie had received the cuts, which still disfigured his arms, the great brown dog Nep had taken a special interest in him. Having very early made the discovery that the little gentleman was not by any means capable of taking care of himself, Nep had privately resolved that, as far as he could do so, without neglecting his other duties, he would keep a watchful eye over the child; for Nep was very jealous of his master's honour, and naturally thought that it would be a great disgrace to him, and Rye Farm in general, if any of the little visitors came to harm during their stay there. Such a thing should not happen if he could help it, Nep determined; but without, I fear, having the least idea what an addition to his toils and

anxieties the guardianship of restless little Archie would cause him.

Hitherto, he had been in the habit of considering that he had done a hard day's work, if he had sat all day long in front of his kennel, which stood near the entrance of the farm-yard, provided he could feel certain that he had not allowed anyone to pass by or come in without barking at them till his throat was sore, and his jaws ached; but now the case was quite different. It was decidedly against his conscience to leave this post of duty at all, unless his master called him; but it was impossible to remain quietly there, when he could hear a frightful noise among the fowls or ducks, at the side of the house, and feel perfectly certain that that little piece of mischief, Archie, was somehow or other concerned in the uproar.

So Nep's days were now spent in ceaselessly hurrying from place to place; unless, indeed, his cares were relieved by seeing the object of his anxiety starting with the farmer for a drive in the cart, or going with Mrs. Edwards for a walk in the village. Then Nep would return to his post

of observation in front of his kennel, and lie down there, with an air of comfort and satisfaction that was quite amusing. But you must not think that, because Archie was such a source of anxiety to him, the old dog did not like the child. On the contrary, he had at once conceived a strong affection for him, which Archie was quite ready to return. The farmer was very much pleased to see the friendship between them, because, as he told his wife, he always considered that Nep was quite capable of watching over any young thing, from a newly-hatched chicken, to a wild young animal like Archie. So Archie and Nep were allowed to play together to their hearts' content, and all went on well till one unlucky day, when an accident happened, which neither Nep nor Archie ever forgot.

It was one of Mrs. Edwards' particularly busy days—a washing or ironing day, I don't know which—one of those days when she had no time to take the children for a walk, and they were, therefore, rather at a loss for something to do. May's foot was not yet strong enough to allow

her to run about out of doors again; but Florrie and Archie were restless, and begged hard that they might go out and play in the garden; indeed, they gave their good-natured nurse no peace till she gave her consent.

It was hard to tell what harm they could do themselves in the garden; but Mrs. Edwards felt uneasy, for she was so busy that she could not even spare Patty to go with them, and it was impossible for her to watch them from the window, and get on with her work as she wished. In this perplexity, Mrs. Edwards thought of her husband's words respecting Nep, and going to the door to let the children out, she thought she would call him, and put his little friend Archie under his charge. The obedient dog came running at the sound of her voice, and when she said, "Nep, good Nep, go and take care of little master," he looked up in her face most benevolently, as if to say, "Don't be afraid, I'll see after him," and trotted off with the children, as steadily and demurely as if he had been born to be a nurse-maid, and understood the business perfectly well.

Florrie and Archie were well pleased to have him for a companion, and half-an-hour passed away in perfect happiness and safety. They were lying on the grass, with Nep beside them, watching the soft fleecy clouds floating across the clear blue sky, when Florrie spied Patty coming towards them with a large basket on her arm. She was going to gather peas in the kitchen-garden, she said, and her aunt had sent her to see if Florrie and Archie would not like to go and help her.

Florrie was delighted, but Archie was lazy, and said he would not come yet, he liked better lying on the grass, doing nothing; by and by he would come and help. So Patty and Florrie went off together, leaving Nep, who evidently considered Archie his more particular charge, sitting demurely by his side.

But though it had not been Master Archie's pleasure to help in the work of gathering peas, he soon began to think that it was dull work watching the clouds by himself, and that he had better look about him for something more amusing to do. Accordingly, with Nep still close by his side,

he rose and sauntered out of the garden into a large rough piece of ground, known by the name of the Warren. It was a sloping meadow, used by the farmer as a kind of almshouse for two old horses, almost past work, and any other sick or injured creatures on the farm. Archie could come to no harm here, you will perhaps say; but, apparently, Nep thought differently, for when they reached the gate, and he perceived where the child was going, the sensible creature tried every means in his power to prevent him: first, by pulling his frock, as if to hold him back; then by standing in front of him, and gazing in his face with a reproachful look, which said, as plainly as words could, "You know you have no business to go there;" and finally, when neither of these attempts seemed likely to prevail, he began licking his face as if to induce him, by coaxing, to give up his purpose.

But Archie was determined, and Nep, who probably guessed what was his object in entering the field, followed him as closely as possible. There was, at the other end of this field, a deep

pond, which, as it was particularly muddy and dirty, was a very favourite spot with some ducks which had quarrelled with the rest of their family, and removed by common consent to their present place of abode.

This Archie knew quite well, and it was towards this pond that he directed his course, for, like most little boys, he was extremely fond of chasing ducks, and driving them into the water, naturally thinking that as they could swim much better than they could walk, they had no business ever to be on dry ground at all. Whether Archie thought he was conferring a favour on the farmer when he drove those wicked ducks into the water, I do not know; but certainly Nep did not think so, and strongly objected to the whole proceeding. Perhaps he knew how deep the pond was, and felt uneasy lest Archie might suffer more inconvenience than a soaking if he should tumble in; or perhaps it was that he disliked to see the poor ducks frightened and chased about: however that may be, he persisted in tugging at Archie's pinafore as if he would pull him away by main force,

till the little fellow, growing angry at his interference, struck his protector with all his little strength. Nep was quite unaccustomed to blows, and doubtless felt deeply hurt at such a return for his well-intentioned endeavours, for he relinquished his hold of Archie's pinafore, and, retiring to a little distance, sat down, still however keeping his eye on the child. Some minutes had passed in this way, during which Archie ran round and round the pond, shouting at the ducks to keep them from coming out of the water, and throwing pieces of stick and stones at those who were pertinacious in their attempts to land; when Nep suddenly pricked up his ears, and then, after hesitating a minute and casting one anxious glance at Archie, darted off and was out of sight in a minute. He had heard his master's whistle, and though it certainly came at an inconvenient time, Nep could not resist the impulse to obey it.

The farmer had heard from his wife that the two children were playing in the garden with Nep; but not being able to find them there, nor obtain any answer when he called them by name,

he had whistled to the dog, feeling certain that if he could find out where he was, he should discover the children at the same time, for he was quite confident that Nep would be with them. The dog's appearance by himself puzzled him, and he began to grow uneasy, especially when Nep showed no signs of intelligence when his master, patting his head, said, "Well, Nep, where's Florrie?" Nep only wagged his tail, and looked inquiringly in the farmer's face, as if unable to comprehend what he wanted.

"They're in some mischief, I'll be bound," muttered the farmer to himself, "but we'll find them between us, Nep and I. Nep, old fellow, look, hunt, where's little Archie?"

This question seemed much more intelligible to the dog than the former one had been; he knew the name of Archie well enough, and giving one more look at his master's face to make sure that he had guessed right, he turned quickly round, and trotted off in the direction from which he had come.

"In the Warren!" exclaimed the farmer, as he

saw where the dog was leading him; "what next; what can they be doing there? Hulloa! what's the matter?" For at this moment, Nep, who had been quietly trotting a few paces in advance, started, pricked up his ears, and then darted off, bounding over the fences and all obstacles that came in his way, and was out of sight in an instant.

"He heard something," said the farmer to himself; then suddenly remembering the pond in the Warren, and that the dog had gone in that direction, he quickened his pace into a run, his kind heart growing more and more heavy with fear, as he recollected that it was quite deep enough to drown so young a child as Archie. The moments that elapsed before he came in sight of the pond seemed ages; but, when he did, he could see nothing of the children. A horrible fear seized him that they had both fallen in; for he did not know that Florrie had gone with Patty to the kitchen-garden, and had naturally concluded that if Archie was in the Warren, Florrie must be there too.

At the same moment he perceived that there was a strange commotion among the ducks on the edge of the pond, a cackling and screaming and fluttering of wings, and in another instant he discovered that Nep and something else were in the water. What that something else was he could not doubt for a minute; he knew quite well that it must be either Archie or Florrie; the only question was, where was the other?

Nep struggled out of the water with his burden just as his master came up, and laid Archie down at his feet with a look of great satisfaction. But the farmer scarcely looked at the unconscious little face, so anxious did he feel to know where Florrie was.

"Back, back, Nep!" he exclaimed, pointing to the water; "find Florrie; fetch, fetch, quick!" But Nep, wiser than his master, seemed for once disposed to disobey; he knew there was nothing more to be found in the water, and stood licking Archie's face as he lay on the wet ground by the side of the pond, till the farmer, growing every moment more alarmed, almost forced him back

into the water again. There he swam, and splashed, and paddled about till he came upon Archie's little straw hat, which was floating among some tall weeds; this he seized with delight, and evidently thinking that he had discovered what his master wanted, swam ashore with it, and laid it down by Archie's side, with a look at his master, which seemed to say, "I thought you'd more sense than to care about that."

But the farmer was not satisfied; he knew the bottom of the pond consisted of mud and slime, and he could not help thinking that Florrie might have sunk into this frightful bed, and so the dog might have missed her. With this dreadful idea he could not leave the place, though he had by this time taken Archie in his arms to carry him to the house. He knew not what to do. Nep's evident satisfaction and perfect content, made him doubtful whether Florrie had been there at all, and, while he hesitated, a sound reached his ear that made his heart bound with joy and thankfulness. It was a little voice calling Archie, and before the farmer had time to answer, he saw

Florrie's little figure coming over the rough sloping ground of the Warren towards them.

"I could not think where Archie was," said the little girl, as they approached; "has he gone to sleep, Mr. Edwards? But, oh dear! he's all wet—what's the matter with him?"

"He's been and tumbled into the pond," replied the farmer; "but don't be frightened, Florrie, it's all right now."

"In the pond," said the little girl. "Oh! let me look at him. Are you sure he isn't dead?—he looks dreadful."

"He's only fainted," said the farmer, reassuringly; "he wasn't in the water half a minute. Nep heard him scream out, and was in the pond in a twinkling, and, before I could get there, he'd got him out. Nep's a brave dog, that he is." And then the farmer remembered that he had quite forgotten to praise his favourite, and turned to look for him.

But Nep had done his duty, and could wait for his reward till Archie was safe; he had run on before to the house, as if to get things in readiness

to receive the little patient, and when the farmer reached the door, he found his wife there waiting, alarmed by the barking and extraordinary antics of the dog, but unable to understand what they meant.

She was terribly frightened at the sight of Archie lying still and senseless in her husband's arms; but without waiting to ask any questions, she laid him down in front of the fire, and pulling off his wet clothes, rubbed him with hot blankets, till he began to sigh and sob, and by degrees to come to himself again. Then Nurse said his bed should be made warm, and she would tuck him up snugly, and if he had a good sleep, she hoped he would wake up pretty well again.

Florrie and May had watched their little brother wake up from his death-like swoon with pale faces and quivering lips; but terror had kept them quiet till Nurse said this, then Florrie began to sob and cry as if her heart would break, and some quiet tears ran down May's anxious face. The farmer thought it would do them good to cry for a little while, so he took no notice, and went off with

his wife to see Archie put to bed. But there was some one in the room that did not seem of this opinion; for as Florrie sat and sobbed on a little stool by the kitchen-fire, she felt a rough tongue licking the tears off as they ran down her fat cheeks, and a very hairy head rubbed against her knees.

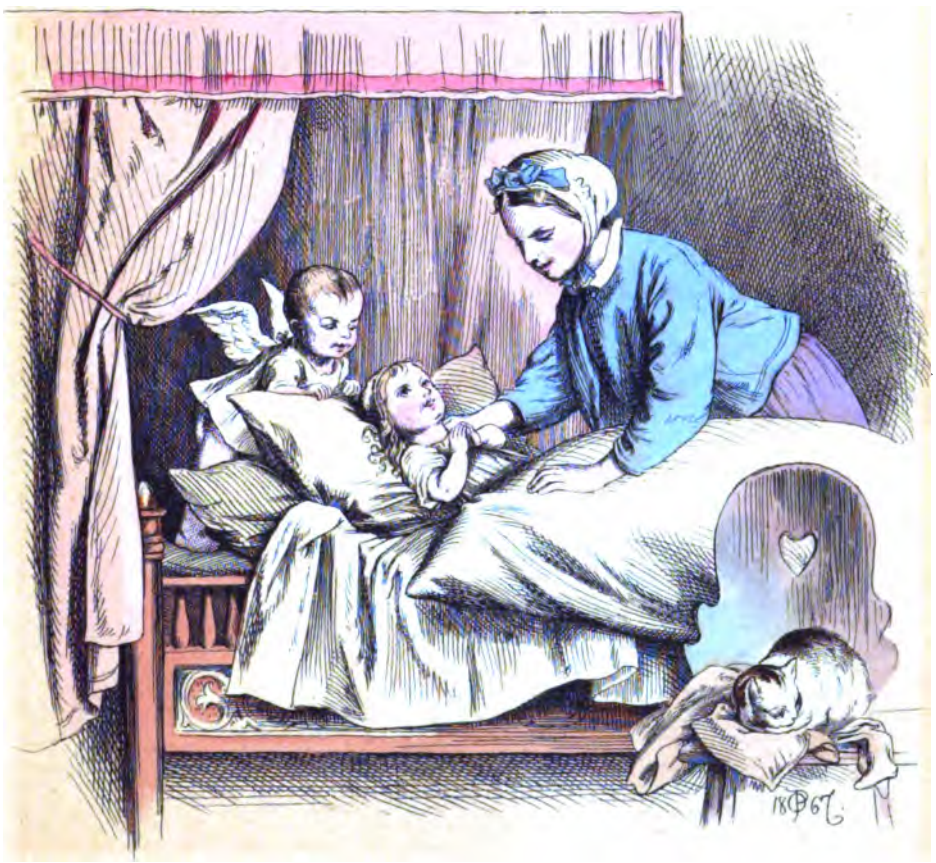
The tears and sobs ceased in a minute, and Florrie threw her arms round the dog's neck, exclaiming that he was the very dearest doggie in the world, and she should love him all her life for having saved Archie. This was the first intelligence May had had of the dog's share in the business, and she too dried her tears while listening to Florrie's story; for the little girl had heard all about it from the farmer as they came home. Nep had never received so many caresses in his life before, and was in the highest possible spirits, when the farmer came down to report that Archie was going to sleep, so they must keep very quiet lest they should disturb him.

The sight of his master made Nep remember that the kitchen was a forbidden place to him,

and he was taking his departure in a great hurry when the farmer called him back to give him the pats and praise that he had so well earned. Florrie was half inclined to think that the dog ought to have some more substantial reward, and began considering what present would be most likely to give him pleasure, being undecided between a large bag of sweets and a splendid new collar. May, when appealed to for her opinion, was quite sure that when her papa heard what had happened, he would be quite willing to bestow both the collar and sweets; and both the little girls were rather indignant when the farmer said he thought he knew what would please Nep best of all, and going to the larder soon returned with a huge bone, at the sight of which Nep grew very much excited, and jumped and leaped about the kitchen, greatly to the peril of the chairs and the crockery on the dresser.

By the time he was in full enjoyment of the bone on the stones in front of the kitchen door, Mrs. Edwards came down stairs, having left Archie sound asleep and looking as well as if

nothing had happened; and in fact she thought he had quite forgotten that anything particular had happened; for just as he was dropping off asleep, he had opened his eyes and said, "Nursie, is it bed-time? I quite forgot to say my prayers;" so she let him say his prayers in bed. "For certainly," added the good woman, with tears in her eyes, "it wasn't a time for him to forget his prayers, when the good God had just saved him from such a dreadful death, and all of us from such a trouble."



CHAPTER VI.

GOOD NEP.

THE good farmer had said very truly that Rye Farm didn't seem like itself, now there were three children playing about the old rooms; but he was not the only person that felt the difference: Nep could hardly believe his ears when, the day after the accident, his mistress came to the door, and calling him to her—he was lying quietly at his old post by the side of the gate—ordered him to rub his feet on the mat, and go in and play with Master Archie.

Only once in his life before had Nep been allowed to remain an instant in the kitchen, and then he had had private suspicions that if his mistress had seen him, he would have been ordered out without loss of time; so it was no wonder that when he heard her desire him to come in, as if he had been a creature that walked on two legs

instead of four, he should be greatly surprised, and, for a moment, hesitate to obey her.

But Mrs. Edwards was as usual busy, and by no means disposed to waste time in talking to a dog, so she repeated her commands in such a tone that Nep had no longer any doubt what he ought to do; so rubbing his feet more carefully than Mrs. Edwards could ever teach any of the farm labourers to do, he ventured just inside the door, and sat down there to wait for further commands.

But this was not what his mistress intended. "Dear me! what's come to the dog?" she exclaimed; "he's as stupid as other dogs this morning. Didn't I tell you, Nep, you were to play with Master Archie? He's got a cold, and can't go out." As she spoke she pointed to a little figure which was seated on a little stool by the fire, huddled up in a large grey shawl, which belonged to the farmer's wife; and at this sight all Nep's intelligence returned. Archie couldn't go out, that was quite plain; but though it was hardly likely he would require to be saved from

drowning while he remained in-doors, Nep could easily imagine that there might be other dangers against which it was necessary to guard him. He eyed the large fire very suspiciously, as if the thought had occurred to him that it was not improbable his charge might tumble into the midst of it; and though he had no strong objection to wetting his coat on Archie's behalf, burning it was quite another matter.

However, he soon forgot all his anxieties in a romp with Archie, who was greatly delighted to have him for a playfellow in-doors; for May and Florrie had gone out with the farmer in the cart, and he had felt very dull indeed, when Mrs. Edwards had said that he must stay at home till his cold was better. The little fellow had heard from Florrie the whole story of how he had been got out of the water by Nep, and also how the good dog had watched him till he had opened his eyes again, and had licked away Florrie's tears when "she could not help crying, she was so glad and so sorry she didn't know what to do," and had declared that he loved Nep better than any-

one else in the world—except, of course, his papa and mamma, who he was quite sure would have done just as Nep did if they had been there.

May and Florrie were rather indignant at the idea of the dog's standing higher than themselves in their little brother's affection; but Archie was determined, and would only yield to their entreaties so far as to declare that, perhaps, some day he might get to love them as much. At present he could think of nothing, and talk of nothing, but Nep, and it was for this reason that Mrs. Edwards had determined to put up with the damage the dog might do, and let him spend the morning with the child.

Nep was as pleased as Archie with this arrangement; though, no doubt, he felt rather anxious when he remembered that his place at the gate was vacant, and that beggars and tramps innumerable would pass without so much as one bark to warn them to go on their way, and leave other people's property alone.

Still, it was so nice to sit by the fire and listen to Archie's praises and thanks, that Nep soon

persuaded himself that he was in his right place, and felt quite happy.

Then he gave Archie some delightful rides on his back about the kitchen, taking great pains to move very gently, lest the unfortunate child, who was always hurting himself, should tumble off and break his head; and Archie patted him, and said he made as good a horse as Grey Bess herself. At last they grew tired of noisy games, and Archie, who was very fond of talking, proposed to Nep that they should sit on the hearthrug together, and tell stories. Apparently, Nep thought this a very good idea, for when Archie squatted himself down in front of the fire, Nep imitated his example, and laid himself down with his nose resting on his fore-paws, and his large eyes fixed on his little friend's face, exactly in a proper position for a listener. And, in fact, he made a very good listener. Archie had seldom found either Florrie or May so attentive; certainly on this occasion he was more than usually careful to select such stories as were likely to be interesting to his audience—stories in which dogs were

the heroes, and such wonderfully good dogs too, that it is by no means astonishing that Nep's attention never once flagged till Archie was tired out, and his fund of stories was quite exhausted. Then the two lay down on the floor together, and by the time Mrs. Edwards came in to get the dinner ready, they were both fast asleep.

The farmer's wife looked round the room to see what damage among her crockery had been the consequence of admitting Nep into a sitting-room; but being unable to discover that any plates were broken, or even cracked, she congratulated herself on the success of her experiment, and told her husband, on his return, that she did not think they could do better than appoint Nep nursemaid to the children during the rest of their visit.

Nep had opened his eyes at his master's entrance, but did not attempt to move, for Archie's arms were clasped round his neck, and the child was still asleep; but he wagged his tail as if to apologize for not getting up to greet him, and pricked up his ears at the sound of his name.

"Nep is an important person," replied the farmer; "I don't know whether I can spare him from his work. When I came in just now, there was an ill-looking fellow hanging about, and if I hadn't chanced to come up, I shouldn't wonder if he'd have made off with a chicken or two; now if Nep had been there, he'd have made him clear off in a trice."

Nep gave a low whine, as if to express his regret that such a thing should have occurred in his absence.

"Well, I'd rather lose a chicken or two," replied the farmer's wife, "than that the children should come to any harm."

"For the matter of that, so would I," replied her husband; "and if we can't look after the children, Nep must. I wish you weren't so busy just now."

"I shan't be now the haymaking's over," said Mrs. Edwards; "while that was on hand there wasn't a creature in-doors to do anything but me, and I couldn't be everywhere at once. Did you see Mr. Cooper in town to-day?"

"Yes, I did," replied the farmer; "and told him all about Archie's accident. He turned fearful white at first, but afterwards he cheered up, when he heard the child was getting over it all right, and none the worse for it but a cold. He says Miss Sissy's getting on."

"Did he mean to tell Mrs. Cooper?" inquired Mrs. Edwards, anxiously.

"Not just at once," replied her husband. "I told him how sorry we were about it, and he said what's about true, that he never saw a child like Archie for getting into mischief; that it would be a wonder if he didn't kill himself before he grew up, for never a week passed without his hurting himself somehow or other, and that he was afraid they hadn't been strict enough about making him mind—which is about true, too, I'm thinking."

"Oh, he's so little," replied Mrs. Edwards; "he'll know better when he's older."

"Know better," said the farmer; "do you think he didn't know he'd no business down by that pond?"

"Yes, I did know," cried a little voice, and Archie, now wide awake, sat bolt upright. "I knew I oughtn't to go to the pond; but I wanted to see the ducks, and so I went. But I won't go there again, because I tumbled in, and, perhaps, next time I shall be drowned quite."

"That's right; I hope you'll keep your resolution, my boy," said the farmer, as he lifted him from the floor, and seated him on a high chair by the table on which Mrs. Edwards was just placing the dinner; "for if you were to tumble in again, Nep mightn't chance to be near enough to get you out in time."

"Nep would be sorry if I was drowned," replied Archie. "Nep likes me—I know he does —don't you, Nep?"

Nep responded by a noise, which, being as much like Yes as No, Archie, of course, interpreted to mean the former; and this point being settled to everybody's satisfaction, they sat down to dinner.

Nep was not certain whether he was expected to stay, or to go and look after his professional duties

out of doors, so he moved restlessly about between the fire-place and the door, till his mistress said she supposed he wanted his dinner too, and bade little Patty go into the larder, and see what bones there were for him.

Archie and the little girls begged that as he had been such a good doggie, he might be allowed to have his dinner in the kitchen; but this was a plan that the tidy farmer's wife would by no means consent to; so it was settled that he should have it in his usual place, and then he would be able to watch for his enemies the tramps at the same time.

Fortunately for the peace of the household, which had been greatly disturbed by Archie's restless spirit, his cold made him so heavy that he did little but sleep during the rest of the day, and was quite ready for bed at a very early hour. While he was being put to bed by Mrs. Edwards, Florrie, who thought herself a model of steadiness and propriety, gravely remarked that she thought Nurse and Mr. Edwards would be very glad if his cold lasted some time, so that he might not be

able to go out and get into mischief again. Such a remark would usually have provoked nothing but a sharp retort from Archie; but his accident had made him feel rather weak and ill, so instead of replying angrily, as Florrie had expected and half hoped—for she dearly loved to tease her little brother—Archie began to cry, and said it was very unkind to say such things when he had got a bad cold and was very ill.

"People are not very ill when they have colds," Florrie replied; "and besides, Archie, if you hadn't tumbled into the water you wouldn't have got a cold."

Archie, rather sulkily, answered that he didn't tumble into the water on purpose; to which Florrie replied, that if he hadn't gone into the Warren, he wouldn't have fallen into the water, and much more to the same purport: till Nurse interposed, saying that it was done now, and couldn't be undone; but she hoped Archie would learn to be more obedient in future, and that most likely his cold would be quite gone in a day or two.

Archie was consoled by this assurance, and extorted a promise from Nurse, that if it was quite fine and his cold was better on the morrow, he should go out for a little while in the warmest part of the day. Unfortunately, Archie was Nurse's especial pet, and when he begged very hard, and put his arms round her neck, she always found it quite impossible to refuse him anything.

She repented of her weakness the next morning, for though the sun was bright, and the patient's cold was certainly better, Archie had got up in such a mischievous humour that she felt convinced he would be much safer in-doors under her own eye. But she had given her promise, and there was no likelihood of the little fellow forgetting it; so when her morning's work was done, she took her knitting and went to sit on a rough kind of seat in the garden, so that she might watch the children at play. May's foot was so much stronger, that she was allowed to walk about a little now; so all the three amused themselves together.

But Archie was in such uproarious spirits, that Florrie, who disliked rough play, soon left her

brother and sister and came to sit down by Mrs. Edwards and have a talk. Little Florrie was in rather a discontented humour, partly because she thought that Archie was petted and noticed more than she was, and partly because the same vexatious little personage had broken her doll.

"And he won't say he's sorry," she complained to Nurse, who was doing her best to sympathize with her; "he's so rude and unkind."

"He is too glad to get out again, to feel sorry for anything just now," Mrs. Edwards said; "by and by, Florrie, he will be very sorry, I dare say."

"No, he won't," said Florrie, bitterly; "and it's all Sissy's fault: she taught him to hate dolls when she was at home at Christmas; before that he used to be very kind to them. Oh, dear! it's dreadful to have a boy in the house!"

Mrs. Edwards could not help laughing at the miserable little face that looked up to her for comfort; but she knew that Florrie's dolls engaged a very considerable portion of her affection, and that nothing excited her displeasure so much as any injury inflicted on one of her numerous family.

So she inquired what mischief Archie had done to Miss Bertha, as she thought it was not at all impossible that she might be able to mend the young lady. Florrie brightened up at once at this suggestion, and ran off to fetch her precious doll, while Mrs. Edwards looked round to see what the other children were doing. They had wandered a little way off, and apparently Archie was doing no more harm than she had expected, when she told him he might gather some flowers. She knew quite well that his little fingers would pull up a good many flowers by the roots instead of gathering the blossoms, and that his small feet would march over any nicely-raked beds that came in his way. All this she had expected; but when she saw him suddenly begin to fling the flowers about the ground, and pick fresh ones merely to scatter them about the paths, her patience and forbearance were quite exhausted. "Mischievous child!" she exclaimed, as she threw down her knitting, and hastened to the spot; "I cannot let him go on in this way." Archie stopped his work of destruction as she approached, for



there was more displeasure in her face than he was used to see there; but he did not drop the flowers with which he had filled his pinafore.

May exclaimed, "Oh, Nurse, he's so mischievous; he's tearing up all the flowers, and I couldn't make him leave off. He is really very naughty."

"We must go into the house, I think," replied Mrs. Edwards, as she took Archie up in her arms. "I wish I had not let him come out to-day."

Archie grew very red, and muttered something about May being a tell-tale; but Nurse took no notice till she had reached the garden-seat again, where Florrie was by this time waiting with her broken doll. There she sat with Archie on her knee, and taking the unfortunate doll from Florrie, she said, "Look here, Archie, who did this? poor dolly's arm is almost out, her hair is almost all pulled off, and all the paint washed off her face; do you know who did all this mischief?"

The little fellow looked at dolly's pale face and ragged wig, and seemed half inclined to laugh; but Nurse's grave face sobered him, and he hung down his head and whispered, "I did."

"And what did you do it for?" inquired Mrs. Edwards.

"'Cause I wanted to," was all the reason Archie could assign.

"But it was very naughty of you to spoil Florrie's doll. Look, you have made her quite unhappy," continued Nurse, gravely.

Archie looked incredulous, and Mrs. Edwards continued: "It was very mischievous of you, to spoil dolly, and tear up my flowers; and very unkind too, for Florrie loves her doll, and I love my flowers. I suppose you don't love either Florrie or me."

This was language which Archie did not like; he looked down at the flowers in his pinafore, and said, "I haven't spoiled these."

"But you will spoil them if you crush them up in your pinafore like that," said Nurse; "they will all be faded in no time if you do not mind."

"I will make them into bunches," said Archie, "one for you, and one for May, and one for Florrie, and then she won't mind about the doll."

"Well, sit down here, and make your bunches,

while I go and mend the doll as well as I can, and then May will bring you in, for I cannot trust you out here any longer."

Archie looked very grave at these words, for he did not like to be told he was not to be trusted; but he did not say anything, and seemed strangely thoughtful while he was occupied in making up his flowers into rather ragged bouquets; nor did he make any resistance when May said they must go in, though he cast a few longing glances behind him as they left the garden.

CHAPTER VII.

ROSIE FORRESTER.

"WELL," said the good farmer, as the family party sat around the tea-table, "I am glad to see that nobody's got drowned to-day; I hope you've been a steady, well-behaved little laddie, Master Archie."

Archie coloured, and became very much engrossed with his slice of bread and butter; while Mrs. Edwards replied:

"Indeed, no, George—I wish he had; but to tell the truth, he does seem as if he could not keep out of mischief, for as soon as one takes one's eyes off him, he's up to some new prank or other."

"Indeed, but I'm sorry to hear that," replied her husband; "but never mind, little man, finish your tea, and while Nurse and sisters go to milk the cows, you shall tell me all about it, and

between us we'll see if we can't hit upon some plan to get rid of the mischievous spirit."

Thus encouraged, Archie wiped away the tears that had begun to flow at Nurse's words, and eat three more slices of bread and butter, to fortify himself for the lecture that he expected when tea was over.

But it was not farmer Edwards's way to lecture; he always said he hadn't words enough to scold properly, so he thought it best not to try; and Archie had never felt less afraid of him in his life, than when he sat on his knee that evening, telling him of the events of the day. But when the sad fate of the doll and the flowers had been fully told, the farmer looked grave, and inquired, "Archie, child, what made you do it? where is the pleasure in spoiling things?"

This was a hard question to answer. Archie could not tell what made him do it; he only knew he wanted to wash the doll's face, and so he did it.

"Well, that I can understand a little," replied the farmer; "but what made you pull its arm out,

and what could possess you to pull the flowers up?"

Still Archie could only answer that he wanted to, he liked it, and so he did it.

"In fact, you like to make your sister unhappy, and to vex Nurse," said the farmer, rubbing his forehead, "it's queer, Archie; are you a real bad boy?"

Archie looked very unhappy; no child likes to be thought a *real bad boy*, but he must be very bad indeed if he liked to make people unhappy; he knew not what to say, or how to excuse himself.

"Look here, Archie," said the farmer suddenly, as if a bright idea had struck him, "when you had hold of that unlucky doll, and were pulling it about so unmercifully, did you give a thought to what your sister would say to it all—did the feeling come to you at all that she would be vexed? Think a bit now."

Archie considered for a long time, and then he said, "No, I didn't think about it, I liked to do it, and so I did it;" but the farmer was not satisfied, and said, "Think again, Archie."

So Archie thought a very long time till his head ached, then he gave a great jump, and exclaimed, "Yes, it did just pop in and popped out again; I did think one minute that Florrie would cry, but I couldn't help *that*, 'cause I did want so to get all the red stuff off."

"I see," said Mr. Edwards, gravely; "it's the mischievous spirit in you? But what's to be done? that's the question."

"I won't spoil the doll again," replied Archie, who always found it very easy to promise amendment, and was also beginning to think that the subject had been discussed long enough.

"No, as it *is* spoiled, I suppose you can hardly do it again," said the farmer; "but it's the same spirit leads you into all your scrapes. It was the love of mischief made you go to the pond the other day, because you wanted to drive the ducks, and if you don't mind, it will lead you into some worse trouble."

"I will mind," said Archie. "Please tell me about the bull that tossed your brother Dick."

"Oh, oh!" said the farmer, "you are tired of

such serious talk; but one word, little man, and I've done: next time you want *very much indeed* to do something—for that seems to be the sure sign that the mischievous spirit's upon you—just pull up a minute, and think whether your mother would like to see you doing it; that's the best advice I can give you, and it wouldn't be amiss to put a piece into your prayers, asking the great God to keep you from wanting to get into mischief. And now I've done, and you want to hear about the bull and Dick, do you?"

"Yes, all about it," said Archie, delighted to have the subject changed; "don't leave out anything, as you do sometimes."

Mr. Edwards promised to do his best to tell the story fully, and the rest of the time that Nurse and the little girls were absent was occupied in this way, to Florrie and May's great indignation, who declared, when they found out what had been going on in their absence, that it was quite too bad of Archie to get the farmer to tell stories when they were out of the way, and could not hear them.

This reminded the farmer of a piece of news which he had quite forgotten to tell his wife, though, as he said, he was sure he had put it away in the safest corner of his memory bag.

"That's the very reason you forgot it," replied his wife, laughing; "I often tell you that you put things away so safely, that you can't even find them yourself again, and it's the same with your memory bag, I fancy. But now you have found it, let's hear what it is."

"Well," said the farmer, "as I was driving along Ditchworth Lane this afternoon, Mrs. Forrester's carriage passed me; but when she saw me, she called to the coachman to pull up, as she wanted to speak to me about that young cow I sold her last week. And then she asked me who the little people were she saw in our pew on Sunday. I told her all about it, and she said she used to know Mrs. Cooper very well when she lived in the town, and she wished we'd let the little folks come and spend a day with her little Rosie at the Rectory. She made sure first that the children had left home before their sister came

into it; no doubt she was afraid for that precious Miss Rosie."

"And naturally enough, as she's an only one," replied Nurse; "but what answer did you give the good lady?"

"I told her a little about some of the accidents we've had, and said I wasn't sure as how you'd like to let 'em all go at once, and that Miss May's foot was not quite strong yet; so she said, at any rate she supposed she could have little Florrie, and that if to-morrow was fine she'd drive here to fetch her."

Mrs. Edwards's face, which had looked rather anxious at the first part of her husband's news, brightened up when she heard that all her precious pets were not to go at once; for she knew quite well that little Rosie Forrester was used to being very tenderly and gently treated, and she, therefore, dreaded the consequences of rough, mischievous Archie spending a whole day in her company. Florrie, being shy and timid, too, was certainly the fittest companion for the delicately cherished little lady, who would be certain to cry if she met with any rough treatment.

So it was settled that Florrie, and Florrie only, should go; and the little girl who had been growing unhappy of late, because she fancied that Archie was noticed and petted more than she was, was greatly delighted with the prospect of spending the following day at Ditchworth Rectory, and speedily recovered her good temper and lively spirits.

Accordingly, the next morning, very soon after breakfast, Mrs. Edwards dressed Florrie in a nice white frock, that she might be ready whenever she was sent for, and Florrie and Archie perched themselves on the window-seat to watch for the carriage. They had not long to wait before a great barking from Nep announced that some strangers were approaching, and a pretty little basket-carriage, drawn by two grey ponies, turned in at the farm-gate. Then, as Mrs. Forrester was in rather a hurry, Florrie's hat and jacket were quickly put on, and in a few moments she was seated by little Rosie's side, and driving swiftly away from the farm. Both the little girls were unfortunately very shy, and no attempts towards

forming an acquaintance were made until they reached the Rectory, and were walking about the large garden hand-in-hand. Then Florrie summoned up courage to ask her little hostess a few questions, which by degrees broke down Rosie's shyness, and she condescended to ask some in return; so that by the time they were called in to dinner, both of them had found their tongues, and chattered to such a degree, that Mr. Forrester, who was a very grave, silent man, looked very much astonished.

After dinner, as Florrie had seen everything there was to be seen in the garden, Rosie decided that they should go to the nursery and visit the dolls. Nothing could promise more enjoyment to doll-loving Florrie than such a plan, and hand-in-hand the two little friends climbed the staircase to the nursery regions.

Rosie had no less than eleven dolls; and Florrie, who had never had more than three at one time in her life, was in ecstasies of delight. Three of them she discovered Rosie had hitherto neglected to name, and she instantly suggested that they

should both set to work at once to supply the deficiency.

"I always think it is so hard to choose names for dolls," replied Rosie; "but, now you are here, perhaps we can. What are your dolls' names!"

"My best doll's name is Angelina, and my common dolls are Jenny and Bob," replied Florrie. "May's dolls have much better names than mine, because she finds them in the newspapers; but I can't read the newspapers. May's best doll has six names. I never can remember them all; the three first are Alexandrina Clementina Wilhelmina—aren't they nice names?"

"Very nice indeed," replied Rosie; "but I would rather name my dolls after somebody. Shall I call this one Florence, after you?"

Florrie was highly gratified at this proposal; and after having duly named the other dolls, they agreed that they would play at keeping a hospital. So the eleven dolls were put to bed; Rosie determined that she would be the nurse, and Florrie should be the doctor who would visit the patients.

Having made these arrangements, they played very happily for some time, till Rosie, who soon wearied of any amusement, began to complain that Florrie did not act the doctor properly.

"You tell the dolls there's nothing much the matter with them," she said, quite pettishly; "that's so absurd, because, of course, people don't go to a hospital unless they're very ill."

"But doctors always tell their patients there's nothing much the matter with them," pleaded Florrie. "Our doctor at home often comes to see me, and when he has looked at my tongue, and twisted me round and round, he always says there's nothing the matter, but he'll send me a little something, and I shall be all right to-morrow. And then, when I'm going to bed, mamma comes up and gives me such an awfully big powder—it fills a spoon—and it chokes me, and gets into my nose, and makes me so dreadfully sick; so then I know that there *was* something the matter, though he said there wasn't."

"But all doctors don't tell stories, if yours does," said Rosie, fretfully; "you don't play



properly, Florrie," and she put the corner of her pinafore into her eye, and began to whimper.

Florrie did not like this at all; she was afraid Mrs. Forrester would come up and blame her for making Rosie cry, so she said, in a consoling tone, "Never mind, Rosie, you shall be doctor, and I'll be nurse; it will make a change."

This was just what Rosie wanted, so she dried her eyes immediately, and was merry and good-tempered till she wanted another change in their game, when she again became fretful and cross. Altogether Florrie did not like her little friend so well as she expected; the day began to seem very long, and when the pony-carriage came to the door to take her home, she was quite ready to go.

It seemed a long time since she parted from Archie and May; and she made a resolution as she went home that she would never again think Archie a plague, or quarrel with May. Whether or not she kept this resolution, I leave my little readers to guess. Little people make so many resolutions of this kind, that it is not very strange if they sometimes forget all about them.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LAST DAY AT THE FARM.

DURING the rest of their stay at Rye Farm, the little Coopers saw a good deal of Rosie Forrester. Sometimes, in their walks with Nurse, they met her either walking or driving with her mamma; and on one of these occasions, May and Archie were introduced by Florrie to her little friend. But Rosie always seemed to prefer the company of Florrie, and confessed that she often could not help thinking that May was laughing at her, and that she was afraid of Archie, because he was so mischievous. She thought May was so very clever, that she could not care for dolls or children's games; and May, who, as we have seen, prided herself on her superiority to *the children*, did not care to undeceive her.

So, whenever Rosie came to see them at the

farm, it was to Florrie she talked and told her little secrets; and the two children, unmindful of the little disagreements that often disturbed their intercourse, promised each other that they would always be friends, and when they could write well enough, they would write long letters to each other, as grown-up people did. Mrs. Forrester was very glad for her little girl to have some friends of her own age, and often told Florrie that she hoped some day her mamma would let her come and stay with Rosie for some time, that they might get to know each other better. Florrie was rather troubled about this invitation, for she fancied that Mrs. Forrester expected her to say that she should like very much to go and stay at Ditchworth; and when she thought of grave Mr. Forrester, and of leaving Archie and May, and staying there all by herself, she could not truly say she wanted to go. She could only hope that Mrs. Forrester might forget, and not write to her mamma till she was much bigger and older, when she thought she should not mind going so much.

Meanwhile May's foot had got quite well, and she was able to run about again, and play in the fields and lanes, and help to keep Archie out of mischief. And I really do think that his plunge into the pond did that mischievous young gentleman some little good, together with the farmer's constant reminder and good-natured teasing. Perhaps, too, Archie tried to follow his good advice, though he had thought it tiresome and dull when it was given, and preferred listening to the story of Dick and the bull. But whatever was the reason, there must have been some improvement, for, before he left the farm, Mrs. Edwards was able to trust him to run about the house and garden by himself, without any other guardian than his two little sisters. Only once again had she reason to regret having reposed confidence in him.

The children were very fond of going to the hen-house to look for the eggs that the hens had laid; and as they considered it such a delightful task, and were rather apt to quarrel about which of them should go, Mrs. Edwards had suggested

that they should do it by turns, only, as Archie was so little, when it was his turn one of his sisters should go with him. Now it happened that, on one of Archie's mornings, both the little girls were very busily occupied in giving a bath to a number of canaries that inhabited a large cage in the farm kitchen, and as neither of them were ready to go with him, Archie begged that he might go by himself, promising that he would be very careful not to drop the basket, and break the eggs. At first the farmer's wife demurred, and said she thought she would come with him herself; but her husband interposing, and saying, "Oh, let the child go, he can't do more than break an egg or so," she gave up the idea, and let him have his wish.

And Archie really did mean to keep his word, and do nothing but collect the eggs and bring them safely home. Why was it, then, that when he had been gone about ten minutes, the farmer, who was passing near, heard such a screaming in the hen-house, that he turned aside to see what it meant, and found Master Archie dragging a poor

hen along by a piece of string, that he had tied round her neck, almost strangling the poor thing, who was fluttering and struggling, frightened nearly out of its wits? The temptation had been too strong for him—"He only wanted to see how it looked."

For once, the good farmer was really angry; he loved all his live creatures, and could not bear to see them tormented. Archie had never seen him look as he did then, and he did not soon forget that look, nor the shake with which he was turned out of the hen-house. I think that shake did him a world of good; anyhow, this was the last of Master Archie's pranks during his stay at Rye Farm.

But their visit was drawing to a close. Mrs. Cooper had written, after they had been at the farm about a month, to say that she was quite ashamed to think how long Mrs. Edwards had been troubled with them, and to tell her that she hoped soon to be able to make some other arrangements. But the farmer and his wife had grown so fond of them, even of mischievous little Archie,

that they begged Mrs. Cooper to let them stay a week or two longer.

And the children, on their part, had become so used to the farmer, that they seemed in no hurry to go; and with one voice declared that they were very sorry when a second letter came to say that Mr. Cooper's sister had undertaken to go with the three little ones to the sea-side, where, as soon as it was considered safe, Mrs. Cooper hoped to join them.

They all declared they would much rather stay at the farm, they liked their dear old Nurse much better than Aunt Lucy, who, they were quite sure, though they had never seen her, was old and cross.

Mrs. Edwards tried to stop their lamentations by telling them that she remembered seeing their Aunt Lucy when Sissy was a little baby, and that she was a very nice lady, neither old nor cross; but they were not to be comforted.

May declared, that though she wasn't old when Sissy was a baby, yet, as that was more than ten years ago, she must be very old now; and Florrie

said it didn't much signify whether she was old or not, for she didn't know them, and they didn't know her, and so they would be sure to be uncomfortable.

This speech the farmer listened to with a very funny smile, and then he gave a deep groan, which made all the children stare at him in astonishment; and Archie inquired what was the matter?

"Oh, it is so dreadful to have an old aunt," replied the farmer; "so dreadful to have to go to the sea-side; so dreadful that papas and mammas will settle things without asking their little children's advice!" and he gave another groan.

Florrie and Archie laughed, but May coloured, and looked very much vexed, for she knew that the farmer was laughing at her, and she could not bear to be laughed at; but when Mrs. Edwards remarked that she did not see why they should make themselves unhappy because their aunt was not so young as she once was, both Florrie and May indignantly replied that old ladies who had never had any children were always terribly fidgety and disagreeable, and May proceeded to

give examples of old ladies who she had heard expected children to sit perfectly still all day, doing nothing but hem frills, which, by the by, was a kind of work that May could not endure.

The farmer laughed, and said he believed it was the frills, and not Miss Cooper, that the children objected to after all; and for his part, he thought aunts were very nice things, whether they were old or young—he only wished he had some.

Archie at once volunteered to make over Aunt Lucy to him; but the farmer declared that he was sure she would not thank any one for making her a present of a nephew as old as herself, and a great rough farmer into the bargain. And then he tried to draw their thoughts away from the dismal picture they had drawn of their aunt, by talking of the wonders of the sea, which none of the children had seen.

At first they were all certain that the beach and the cliffs could not be half so nice as the hay-fields; but by degrees the idea of change, and of seeing things quite new to them, produced a won-

derful alteration in their spirits. Florrie wanted to know how big the sea was; and when the farmer tried to give them some idea of what it was like, and described the great waves which they would see in stormy weather, both the little girls asserted that they were convinced that no efforts on their part would be able to prevent Archie's getting drowned; he would be certain to tumble in, and then there would be no Nep to get him out.

This gloomy idea was stoutly protested against by Master Archie, who declared that he had only tumbled into the water once in all his life, and he was quite sure he should never do it again. Florrie was much more likely to do so, for she was always tumbling about; while he was quite certain he had only fallen down stairs three times as long as he could remember.

May felt pretty sure she could recollect four such events, besides innumerable tumbles off chairs and sofas, which Archie considered quite unworthy of mention; but Nurse comforted her by telling her that she was sure Miss Cooper

would look well after her nephew, for she was a very careful lady, and would be very anxious that no harm should happen to them.

"Of course, Sally," said the farmer, "she's certain sure to look well after them; but it strikes me we oughtn't to be letting the young ones grumble at this rate. In my young days children never thought of making their remarks on their parents' arrangements; fancy me telling my father I didn't like to go somewhere where he sent me. I'd like to have seen myself, I would."

Mrs. Edwards smiled, and remarked, "Things are different now-a-days, George."

"And what makes them different—can you tell that?" replied her husband. "No need to tell me that children are different. I've got eyes, and I can see it; but for my part, I don't think it's any great improvement. In my young days there used to be a text, 'Children, obey your parents;' but, somehow or other, it's got twisted round, and the young ones think it's 'Parents, obey your children,' as far as I can see."

"There, there, George!" said his wife; "the

children are wondering what you mean. They can't understand you at all."

"Yes, yes; I can understand," replied Archie, eagerly; "but he said my text quite wrong."

"And what is your text, little man?" inquired the farmer.

"'Children, obey your parents;' but you didn't say it so at all. What did you say?"

"Never mind what I said, my boy; you've got it right, and mind you keep it so."

"But what did you say?" urged Archie; "it was something like mine, but it sounded nicer."

"There, Sally," exclaimed the farmer; "hear that, do. No, my boy; what I said, is the way wicked boys learn your text—you must never learn it that way."

Archie looked grave, and Nurse, anxious to prevent his asking any more questions, told the little girls they would have to pack up their toys and dolls that day, as all the preparations for their journey would have to be finished that evening, it having been settled that Miss Cooper would come to fetch them early the next morning.

"Shall we take all our toys, Nurse? some of them are broken, you know," said May.

"Perhaps they can be mended," replied Nurse. "Sam is very clever at such little jobs; he can get the glue-pot and see what he can do for you this morning."

But with all his cleverness, Sam was not able to mend several of Archie's toys, for that young gentleman, being of a destructive disposition, had smashed nearly all the many toys which Mr. Cooper had sent to the farm at different times for his amusement.

"I can't help it," remarked the young rogue, when May showed him the heap of broken play-things she had collected. "Pa must send me some more. I wish they wouldn't break."

"If I were papa," replied May, solemnly, "I'd make you go without toys, if you can't take better care of them. Look at our dolls, they are as good as when they came."

"Stupid things!" said Archie; "they can't get broken—they're always lying in bed."

"Oh, May!" interrupted Florrie; "what shall

I do with Bertha, the doll Archie spoiled, she isn't worth taking away?"

"You might give her to Patty," suggested May; "she won't mind her having pale cheeks."

"Patty's rather big for dolls," replied Florrie, doubtfully. "I think I'll ask Nurse."

Accordingly, Nurse was consulted, and as she was sure that Patty would be very much pleased with Bertha, the poor sickly-looking doll was gravely assured by her little mistress that she meant to leave her at the farm-house, that the country air might bring back her roses, and make her look healthy again.

May laughed at her little sister's speech, and said if the doll had any sense she would know that it was the country air that had taken away her roses, so it was hardly likely to bring them back again.

"Air!" cried Archie, indignantly. "No, it wasn't; it was water took the colour out of her cheeks. She's like my pink pinafore, that, when it was washed, came home nearly white."

"I wonder you're not ashamed to talk about

Bertha," exclaimed Florrie. "I should be if I had been so mischievous. How would you like it, if somebody pulled your hair off, and washed the colour out of your cheeks?"

"It won't come out," replied Archie, gravely. "One day I tried, and it only came all the more."

"Well, they could pull your hair off," returned Florrie.

Archie shook his head. "It's fastened in very tight," he said.

"How do you know?" inquired May, "have you tried to pull it out?"

"This piece," replied the child, touching a lock that was rather apt to hang over his face; "but it won't come out; some day I shall cut it off, when I can get some scissors."

"No, you mustn't," exclaimed May. "Mamma would be very angry if you did."

"It's my own," replied Archie, looking very defiant. "I may do what I like with it; and so I will cut it off, 'cause it's a plague."

"I shall tell mamma," said May; "and I'm

sure she'll say you mustn't do any such thing. But look here, Florrie! let's give Patty this old wooden cradle for her doll, and these clothes, then it will be more worth having."

Florrie readily consented, and the small amount of self-denial which it certainly did cost her to part with her old darling, was well repaid by seeing the rapture with which Patty received the gift.

Her aunt could hardly get her to attend to any of her usual work, so completely did the thought of her treasure occupy her mind; and Florrie and May, who had been half afraid that the poor faded doll would give her no pleasure, were quite amused to see how many times in that afternoon she was dressed and undressed, put to bed, and taken up again.

The last evening at the farm would have been rather a melancholy one, had it not been for an occurrence that caused the farmer so much amusement, and May so much vexation, that they almost forgot the coming parting.

This was the discovery that Archie had, some-



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how, managed to execute his threat on the offending lock of his hair.

How he had done it he was not disposed to tell; but it was gone, and May, who had been intending to write to her mamma, expressly to let her know of Archie's intention, was unable to determine whether she should say nothing about it, or write at once and tell what he had done.

However, as it was a great deal of trouble to May to write a letter, on second thoughts she contented herself with giving Archie what she called a regular good scolding; which the little fellow received with great unconcern, merely remarking that he felt quite comfortable now that horrid thing was gone, and if it grew again, he would do just the same till it left off growing.

It is true he was a little disconcerted when Nurse held him up to the glass to see what a fright he had made of himself; but he soon consoled himself with the reflection that as he could not reach to look in the glass, it could not

signify to him what he looked like; and besides, as he told Florrie afterwards, nobody cared whether little boys were pretty or not, if they were only good.

THE END.

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